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BALZAC, HONORE DE, 1799-18
THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT :
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Balzac

The marriage contract

CENTRAL


Honoré de Balzac

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

The Human Comedy

PRIVATE LIFE

VOLUME VI



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NATALIE EVANGÉLISTA

Paul returned to the salon, where he saw his mother-in-law talking in a low tone with Solonct, as he had been talking with Mathias. Natalie, shut out from both these mysterious conferences, was toying with her hand-screen.

"What a strange thing it is that they say nothing to me about my own affairs!" she was saying to herself.

c.5

The *Edition Définitive* of the *Comédie
Humaine* by HONORÉ DE BALZAC,
now for the first time com-
pletely translated
into English.

*THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT. LA GRENADIERE.
GOBSECK. IN ONE VOLUME. TRANSLATED
BY GEORGE BURNHAM IVES, AND
ILLUSTRATED WITH FOUR
ETCHINGS.*

SANTA ROSA - SONOMA CO. LIBRARY

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THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

TO G. ROSSINI

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

*

Monsieur de Manerville senior was an honest Norman gentleman well known to Maréchal de Richelieu, who put him in a way to marry one of the wealthiest heiresses in Bordeaux at the time when the old duke went thither to assume control as Governor of Guienne. The Norman sold his estates in Bessin and became a Gascon, fascinated by the charms of the Château de Lanstrac, a delightful place of abode belonging to his wife. In the last days of the reign of Louis XV., he purchased the post of major of the Gardes de la Porte, and lived till 1813, after having safely weathered the storms of the Revolution. This is how he did it. Toward the close of 1790, he went to Martinique, where his wife had property, and entrusted the management of his affairs in Gascogne to an honest notary's clerk, one Mathias, who was a convert to the new ideas. Upon his return, the Comte de Manerville found his property intact and advantageously administered. This judicious conduct was the fruit produced by grafting a Gascon upon a Norman. Madame de Manerville died in 1810. Rendered

keenly alive to the importance of worldly goods by the extravagance of his younger days, and, like many old men, attributing to them a larger place in life than they really occupy, Monsieur de Manerville became progressively saving, stingy and a downright miser. Without reflecting that the avarice of parents paves the way for the prodigality of children, he gave almost nothing to his son, although he was an only son.

Paul de Manerville returned from the college at Vendôme in the latter part of 1810, and remained under the paternal domination for three years. The tyrannous conduct of an old man of seventy-nine toward his heir, necessarily had an important influence upon a heart and character that were as yet unformed. Although he did not lack physical courage, which seems to be in the air in Gascogne, Paul did not dare to contend against his father, and lost that faculty of resistance which engenders moral courage. His sentiments, sternly repressed, took refuge at the bottom of his heart, where he kept them for a long while without giving voice to them; at a later period, when he felt that they were out of tune with the maxims of the world, he might naturally be expected to think rightly and act amiss. He would have fought for a mere word, but he trembled at the thought of dismissing a servant; for his timidity displayed itself in conflicts which call for a constant exercise of the will. Capable of great things to avoid persecution, he would never have prevented it by systematic opposition nor

defied it by a continual display of his will. Cowardly in thought, bold in action, he long preserved that secret purity of soul which makes man the willing victim and dupe of things against which certain natures hesitate to rebel, preferring to endure rather than to complain of them. He was imprisoned in his father's old château, for he had not money enough to consort with the young men of the town; he envied their pleasures, but was unable to share them. Every evening the old gentleman dragged him away in an old carriage, drawn by old horses in shabby harnesses, attended by his old servants shabbily dressed, to a social gathering of royalists, composed of the relics of the parliamentary nobility and the nobility of the sword. These two orders of nobility, having joined forces since the Revolution to resist the imperial influence, had transformed themselves into a landed aristocracy. Trampled under foot by the great but shifting fortunes of the maritime cities, this Bordeaux Faubourg Saint-Germain retorted with proud disdain to the pompous parade indulged in by the commercial classes, the government circles and the military. Too young to understand the social distinctions, and the real necessities concealed beneath the apparent vanity to which they give rise, Paul was bored to death in the society of these fossils, having no idea then that his youthful associations would at a later day assure him that aristocratic pre-eminence which France will always love. He found some slight compensation for the dulness of his evenings in

certain manly exercises in which young men take pleasure, for his father imposed them upon him. In the old gentleman's eyes, to know how to handle weapons, to be a first-class horseman, to play tennis skilfully, to acquire good manners, in a word, to possess the frivolous education of a nobleman of the olden time, was all that was necessary to constitute an accomplished young man. Paul therefore practised fencing and pistol-shooting every morning and went to the riding-school. The rest of his time he passed reading novels, for his father would have none of the elevating studies with which an education is finished to-day. Such a monotonous existence would have been the death of the young man, had not his father's decease delivered him from this tyranny just as it was becoming absolutely unendurable. Paul found a considerable fortune accumulated by his father's miserliness, and landed property in the best possible condition. But he had a horror of Bordeaux, and was no fonder of Lanstrac, where his father had been in the habit of passing every summer, and forcing him to hunt from morning till night.

As soon as the estate was settled, the young heir, thirsty for pleasure, bought consols with his capital, left the management of his landed estates in the hands of old Mathias, his father's notary, and passed six years far away from Bordeaux. Beginning as *attaché* to the embassy at Naples, he went afterward as secretary of legation to Madrid and London, and thus made the tour of Europe. Having acquired a

knowledge of the world, having his mind disabused of many illusions, having squandered the available capital amassed by his father, there came a time when, in order to continue to live as he had been living, Paul must trench upon the income of his real property which had been accumulating in his notary's hands. At that critical moment, seized by one of those ideas which are mistakenly called wise, he determined to leave Paris, return to Bordeaux, manage his own affairs, lead the life of a country gentleman at Lanstrac, improve his property, marry, and some day be elected deputy. Paul was a count, nobility has its value from a matrimonial standpoint, so he could and would make a good marriage. If many women long to marry a title, many more desire a man who knows what life means. Now, for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs, consumed in six years, Paul had acquired that knowledge, which cannot be sold and which is worth as much as the business of a broker, and which demands also long study, a period of probation, examinations, acquaintances, friends, enemies, a certain elegance of figure, good manners, a name easy to pronounce and pleasant to the ear; a knowledge which, moreover, includes love affairs, duels, disastrous betting on horse races, deception, ennui, hard work and a store of undigested pleasure. He was, in short, a dandy. Notwithstanding his insane extravagance, he had not succeeded in becoming a man of fashion. In the burlesque army of social lions, the man of fashion represents the

Marshal of France, the dandy holds a rank equivalent to that of lieutenant-general. Paul enjoyed his little reputation as a dandy and knew how to maintain it. His people were dressed in excellent taste, his equipages were pointed to as models, his suppers attained some celebrity; in a word, his *garconnière*—bachelor establishment—was among the seven or eight whose magnificence equaled that of the best houses in Paris. But he had never ruined a woman, he played without losing, he made no display of his love affairs, he had too high a sense of rectitude to deceive anyone, even a courtesan, he did not leave his billets-doux lying around, and he had no letter box which his friends could search while he was putting on his collar or shaving; as he did not choose to encroach upon his Guienne property, he had none of that fool-hardiness which advises startling exploits and attracts attention to a young man at any price; he borrowed money from no one, and was foolish enough to lend to friends, who abandoned him and never mentioned him again, either kindly or unkindly. He seemed to have figured out his embarrassment beforehand. The secret of his character was in the paternal tyranny which had made him a sort of social mongrel.

“My dear friend,” he said one morning to one of his friends, De Marsay, who afterwards became illustrious, “life has a meaning.”

“One must have reached the age of twenty-seven to realize it,” replied De Marsay, banteringly.

“Yes, I am twenty-seven, and just because I am

twenty-seven I propose to go and lead the life of a country gentleman at Lanstrac. I shall send my furniture down to my father's old house at Bordeaux, and live there except for three months in winter, which I shall pass here in this house, which I shall keep."

"And you will marry?"

"And I shall marry."

"I am your friend, my good old Paul, as you well know," said De Marsay, after a moment's silence; "so let me tell you this—be a good father and a good husband, and you'll become an object of ridicule for the rest of your days. If you could be happy and ridiculous at the same time the thing might be taken into consideration; but you won't be happy. Your grip isn't strong enough to govern a household. I do you full justice: you are a perfect horseman, no one is cleverer than you at dropping the reins and picking them up, making a horse prance, and sitting as if you were glued to your saddle. But, my dear boy, marriage is a different matter. I can see you from here, led at full speed by Madame la Comtesse de Manerville, galloping more frequently than trotting, much against your will, and soon unhorsed!—ah! but unhorsed in such a way that you remain in the ditch with your legs broken. Look here. You have something over forty thousand francs a year left, in real estate in the Department of the Gironde. Very good. Take your horses and your servants, furnish your house at Bordeaux, and you'll be king there; you'll

promulgate the decrees we issue at Paris, and you'll be the correspondent of our stupidity. Very good. Be as wild as you please in the province, make a fool of yourself there if you please—that will be better still! perhaps you will gain celebrity by it. But—don't marry. Who marries nowadays? Business men, to increase their capital, or to have two to draw the plough; peasants, who aim at raising a crop of workmen, by producing a lot of children; brokers or notaries, compelled to find the money for their licenses; ill-fated kings who continue ill-fated dynasties. We are the only ones who are exempt from the pack-saddle, and you propose to put it on your back? After all, why should you marry? You owe your best friend a statement of your reasons. In the first place, even if you should marry an heirless as rich as yourself, eighty thousand francs a year for two, aren't the same thing as forty thousand for one, because there will soon be three or four if children come along. Can it be that you have any affection for the idiotic race of Manervilles, who will never cause you anything but annoyance? in Heaven's name, don't you know anything of the father and mother business? Marriage, my dear Paul, is the most absurd of social immolations; our children alone reap the benefit of it, and don't know what it costs until their horses are grazing on the flowers planted on our graves. Do you regret your father, the tyrant who ruined your youth? How will you go to work to make your children love you? Your forethought for their

education, your anxiety for their welfare, your necessary sternness will turn them against you. Children love an indulgent or a weak father whom they will despise some day. Therefore you will be between dread and contempt. Every man isn't a good father simply for the wishing! Cast your eyes upon your friends, and tell me which of them you'd like for your son! we have known some of them to dishonor their names. Children, my dear fellow, are merchandise, very difficult to care for properly. Yours will be angels? Very good! Have you ever sounded the abyss that separates the life of a bachelor from the life of a married man? Listen to me. As a bachelor, you can say: 'I shall be ridiculous only to a certain point; the public will think of me only what I choose to let them think.' Married, you plunge into bottomless depths of absurdity. As a bachelor, you create your own happiness, you enjoy it to-day, you do without it to-morrow; married, you take it as it comes, and on the day when you long for it, you must do without it. Married, you become an old fool, you reckon up marriage-portions, you prate about public morals and religion, you look upon young people as immoral and dangerous; in short, you become a social academician. You appeal to my pity. The old bachelor whose inheritance is anxiously awaited, who defends himself to his latest breath against an old nurse with whom he pleads in vain for a draught of water, is happy beyond measure compared with a married man. I say nothing of all the vexation,

weariness, annoyance, petty tyranny, irritation, worry, the maddening, narcotizing, paralyzing experience that may attend the conflict between two people who are always in each other's presence, bound together for ever, and both of whom have got caught in a trap, thinking that they had got what they wanted; no, that would be a mere repetition of Boileau's satire, and we know it by heart. I will forgive your absurd idea, if you will promise to marry like a great nobleman, purchase a *majorat** with your fortune, avail yourself of your honeymoon to have two legitimate children, give your wife an establishment entirely distinct from your own, never meet her except in society, and never return from a journey without sending a courier to announce your coming. Two hundred thousand francs a year would be enough for that sort of a life and your antecedents make it possible for you to get that amount together by marrying a rich Englishwoman, hungry for a title. Ah! an artistocratic life of that sort seems to me to be truly French, the only great life, the only life that procures us a woman's respect and friendship, the only life that distinguishes us from the common herd, the only life, in short, for which a young man can afford to abandon the life of a bachelor. Occupying such a position, the Comte de Manerville stands as the guide of his age, places

*A *majorat* is the name applied to real estate attached to the possession of a title of nobility, and which cannot be alienated; therefore it passes, with the title, from heir to heir. It has the characteristics of what is called in England an *estate in tail*, but is peculiar in that it can only exist in connection with a title of nobility.

himself above everybody else, and can become nothing less than a minister or ambassador. Ridicule will never reach him, he has secured the social advantages of marriage and retains the privileges of a bachelor."

"But, my good friend, I am not De Marsay; I am simply, as you yourself do me the honor to remind me, Paul de Manerville, a good father and good husband, deputy of the Centre, and perhaps a peer of France—an extremely commonplace destiny; but I am modest, I am resigned to my fate."

"And what about your wife," said the pitiless De Marsay, "will she be resigned?"

"My wife, my dear fellow, will do what I wish."

"Ah! my poor friend, haven't you got beyond that? Adieu, Paul. From this day, I refuse to esteem you. But just a word more, for I cannot in cold blood subscribe my name to your abdication. This is where the force of our position lies. A bachelor, even if he has only six thousand a year, if his only fortune is his reputation as a man of fashion, the memory of his success—why, that shadow of the imagination has a tremendous value. Life still offers opportunities to the faded bachelor. Yes, his aspirations may embrace anything. But marriage, Paul, is the social *Thus far shalt thou go and no farther*. Once married, you will never be anything more than you are, unless your wife deigns to take you in hand."

“Why, you keep crushing me with your extraordinary theories!” said Paul. “I am tired of living for others, of having horses for show, of doing everything with a view to what people will say of it, of ruining myself so that idiots shan’t cry out: ‘See, Paul still has the same carriage. How far gone is his fortune? Is he throwing it away? is he speculating on the Bourse?—No, he’s a millionaire. Madame So-and-So is crazed over him. He has sent to England for a turnout which certainly is the handsomest thing in Paris. Everybody noticed Monsieur de Marsay’s and De Manerville’s four-horse calèches at Longchamps—they were gotten up in perfect style.’—And a thousand other idiotic remarks with which a pack of imbeciles follow our movements. I am beginning to see that this life of rolling, instead of walking, uses a fellow up and ages him. Believe me, my dear Henri, I admire your power, but I don’t envy it. You know what price to put on everything, you can act and think like a statesman, place yourself above all general laws, commonly received ideas, admitted prejudices, conventional proprieties; in short, you reap the advantages of a situation in which I shall never have anything but bad luck. Your cold, systematic, perhaps accurate, deductions are, in the eyes of the majority of people, shocking immoralities. I belong to the majority. I must play my game according to the rules of the society in which I am forced to live. Even when you take your stand at the apex of all human affairs, on the icy peaks, you still find

emotions there, but I should freeze there. The existence of the great majority of men, to which I belong, is made up bourgeois-fashion of emotions of which I now feel the need. Often a successful ladies' man carries on flirtations with ten at once and has not a single one; in that case, however great his strength, his adroitness, his knowledge of the world, there comes a crisis when he finds himself, as it were, crushed between two doors. For my part, I love the constant and sweet exchange of life for life, I love that delightful existence in which you have a woman by your side."

"You're in a bit of a hurry about your marriage!" cried De Marsay.

Paul was not disconcerted; he continued:

"Laugh at me, if you choose; for my part, I shall deem myself the happiest man in the world when my valet de chambre enters my room to say: 'Madame awaits monsieur for breakfast;' when I can return home at night to find a heart—"

"Still too fast, Paul! You're not yet moral enough to marry."

"—A heart to which I can confide my business troubles and tell my secrets. I desire to live on such intimate terms with a fellow-creature, that our affection will not depend upon a yes or a no, upon a situation in which the most attractive of men causes love to lose its illusions. In a word, I have the necessary courage to become, as you say, a good father and a good husband! I feel that I am capable of appreciating the joys of family life, and I

propose to fulfil the conditions imposed by society upon the man who desires to have a wife and children—”

“You remind me of a beehive. Go ahead! you’ll be a dupe all your life. Ah!—you propose to marry in order to have a wife, do you? In other words, you propose to solve happily and to your own advantage, the most difficult of the problems presented to-day by the bourgeois manners created by the French Revolution, and you begin by a life of isolation! Do you fancy that your wife won’t care anything for this other life that you despise? Will she have become disgusted with it, as you have? If you don’t choose to adopt the attractive conjugal scheme, the programme of which has just been set forth by your friend De Marsay, listen to one last piece of advice. Remain a bachelor thirteen years more and enjoy yourself like a man doomed to perdition; then, at forty, when you have your first attack of gout, marry a widow of thirty-six, and you may be happy. If you marry a young girl, you’ll die a madman!”

“What’s that! tell me why?” cried Paul, a little piqued.

“My dear fellow,” replied De Marsay, “Boileau’s satire against women is a succession of common-places put in the form of poetry. Why shouldn’t women have their faults? Why deprive them of their inheritance in the most incontestable of all human possessions? And so, in my judgment, the problem of marriage is no longer to be stated as it is

stated in that tirade. Pray, do you suppose that it's the same with marriage as with love, and that it's enough for a husband to be a man to be loved? Do you expect to go into the boudoirs and bring away none but pleasant memories? Everything about our bachelor existence paves the way for a fatal error on the part of the married man who is not a profound student of the human heart. In the happy days of his youth, a man, by reason of our peculiar customs, always confers happiness, he triumphs over women already seduced, who obey their desires. On both sides, the obstacles created by the laws, the sentiments and the woman's natural impulse to defend herself, engender reciprocal sensations which mislead superficial people as to their future relations in the marriage state, where those obstacles no longer exist, where the woman tolerates love instead of permitting it, and often repels enjoyment instead of craving it. There, so far as we are concerned, life changes its aspect. The bachelor, independent and free from care, always the aggressor, has nothing to fear from failure. In the marriage state, a check is irreparable. If it is possible for a lover to induce a woman to reverse an unfavorable decree, such a reversal, my dear fellow, is the Waterloo of husbands. Like Napoléon, the husband is doomed to win victories which, however numerous they may be, do not prevent the first defeat from overthrowing him. The woman who is flattered by a lover's persistence and happy in his wrath, calls the same qualities brutal in a

husband. Whereas the bachelor chooses his ground, whereas he is permitted to do anything, a master is permitted to do nothing, and his battlefield never changes. Then the struggle is reversed. A wife is inclined to refuse what she owes; while, as mistress, she grants what she does not owe. Have you, who propose to marry and who will marry, ever meditated upon the Civil Code? I have never soiled my feet in that cesspool of commentaries, that rubbish-loft of nonsense called the School of Law, I have never opened the Code, but I can see how it applies to the raw wounds of society. I am a legist just as a clinical lecturer is a doctor. Sick-ness isn't in the books, but in the sick man. The Code, my dear fellow, puts women under guardianship, it looks upon them as minors, as children. Now, how are children governed? By fear. In that word, Paul, is the bit of the beast. Feel your pulse! See if you can disguise yourself as a tyrant, gentle and trusting as you are and such a true friend; you at whom I used to laugh, at first, and whom I love dearly enough to-day to place my science at your disposal. Yes, what I say is taught by a science to which the Germans have already given the name of anthropology. Ah! if I had not determined to live by enjoyment, if I had not a profound antipathy for those who think instead of acting, if I did not despise the blockheads who are stupid enough to believe in the life of books, when the sand of the African deserts is composed of the dust of nobody knows how many unknown, pulverized

Londons and Venices and Parises and Romes, I would write a book on modern marriages, on the influence of the Christian system; I tell you, I would set a lamp on the heaps of sharp rocks among which lie the partisans of the social *multiplicamini*. But is Humanity worth a quarter of an hour of my time? Is not the only reasonable use of ink to decoy hearts by love-letters?—By the way, shall you bring the Comtesse de Manerville here?"

"Perhaps," said Paul.

"We shall continue to be friends," said De Marsay.

"If—?" Paul replied.

"Don't you be alarmed; we will treat you as courteously as the Maison-Rouge treated the English at Fontenoy."

*

Although this conversation had somewhat shaken his decision, the Comte de Manerville set about putting his purpose in execution and returned to Bordeaux during the winter of 1821. The money he expended in restoring and furnishing his house worthily sustained the reputation as a man of fashion that had preceded him thither. Admitted by anticipation, on account of his early connections, into the royalist society of Bordeaux, to which he belonged by virtue of his political opinions as well as by his name and his fortune, he became the sovereign of fashion therein. His good-breeding, his manners, his Parisian education delighted the Bordeaux Faubourg Saint-Germain. An old marchioness made use of an expression formerly in vogue at the court to designate the blooming youth of the beaux, the dandies of other days, whose language and manners set the fashion; she said of him that he was the *Fleur des Pois*—Pea Blossom—. Liberal circles picked up the phrase and made of it a sobriquet, which was used by them in mockery, by the royalists in compliment. Paul de Manerville gloriously acquitted himself of the obligations his sobriquet imposed upon him. The same thing happened to him that happens to second-rate actors: when the public bestows its attention upon them, they become almost good. Feeling entirely at his

ease, Paul displayed such good qualities as were consistent with his faults. There was nothing ill-humored or bitter in his raillery, his manners were not haughty, his conversation with women was characterized by the respect that they love,—neither too great deference nor too great familiarity; his self-conceit was exhibited only in his care of his person, which made him the more agreeable; he had due consideration for rank, he allowed young men a certain amount of freedom to which his Parisian experience placed bounds; although very skilful with the pistol and the sword, he had a feminine gentleness of manner which people liked. His moderate height and his corpulence, which had not yet become obesity—two obstacles to physical elegance—did not prevent his exterior man from playing his part as the Bordeaux Beau Brummel. A fair complexion, heightened by the ruddy coloring of health, well-shaped hands, a pretty foot, blue eyes with long lashes, black hair, grace of movement, a chest voice that never departed from the middle register and went to one's very heart, everything about him was in harmony with his sobriquet. It was a happy comparison of Paul to the delicate flower which demands careful cultivation, whose beauty is fully displayed only in moist and kindly soil, whose growth is impeded by harsh treatment, which is scorched by too bright sunlight and withered by the frost. He was one of those men who are made to receive happiness rather than to confer it, who depend much upon womankind, who long

to have their thoughts divined and to be encouraged, and to whom there is something providential in conjugal love. Although such a character may create difficulties in private life, it is attractive and full of charm in the eyes of the world. Thus Paul achieved a great success in the restricted provincial society, where his intellect, which was all in half-tones, was sure to be more fully appreciated than in Paris. The arrangement of his house, and the renovation of the Château de Lanstrac, where he introduced English ideas of luxury and comfort, absorbed the funds that his notary had invested for him in six years. Being reduced at last to his forty-odd thousand francs a year, he thought it would be a judicious plan to so manage his household as to expend no more than that sum. When he had made a formal exhibition of his equipages, had entertained the most distinguished young men of the city, and had given hunting-parties for them at his renovated château, Paul realized that provincial life without marriage was a delusion. As he was still too young to employ his time in money-getting or to take an interest in the speculative improvements in which provincial gentry always engage at last, being driven thereto by the necessity of providing for their children, he soon felt the need of the ever-changing diversions, which are the very life of a Parisian when he has once become accustomed to them. A name to keep up, heirs to whom he could hand down his property, the connections which he should form by having a house where the leading families

of the country could assemble, the tedium of irregular liaisons, were not, however, controlling considerations. Upon his first arrival at Bordeaux, he had secretly become enamored of the queen of the city, the celebrated Mademoiselle Evangélista.

About the beginning of the century, a rich Spaniard named Evangélista had taken up his residence at Bordeaux, where his credentials, as well as his fortune, had caused him to be received in the salons of the nobility. His wife was largely instrumental in keeping him in good odor in that proud aristocracy which had taken him up so readily, it may be, only to annoy the second-rate society. A Creole, with the habits of a woman accustomed to be served by slaves, Madame Evangélista, who, by the way belonged to the Casa-Réals, an illustrious family attached to the Spanish monarchy, lived like a great lady, had no idea of the value of money, and placed no restraint upon her fancies, no matter how extravagant, as she found that they were always gratified by an uxorious spouse who generously kept the details of financial affairs concealed from her. Delighted to find that she was pleased with Bordeaux, where his business required him to sojourn for some time, the Spaniard purchased a fine house there, set up an establishment, received on a grand scale, and showed the best taste in everything. And so from 1800 to 1812, Monsieur and Madame Evangélista were the one subject of conversation in Bordeaux. The Spaniard died in 1813, leaving his wife a widow at thirty-two, with an immense

fortune and the prettiest little daughter in the world, a child of eleven who promised to become and became a most accomplished young woman. Adroit as Madame Evangélista was, the Restoration altered her position; the royalist party went through a purifying process and some families left Bordeaux. Although her husband's brain and hand were sorely missed in the management of her affairs, for which she had the indifference of the Creole and the inaptitude of the coquette, she chose to make no change in her manner of living.

At the time when Paul determined to return to his native province, Mademoiselle Natalie Evangélista was a person of remarkable beauty and apparently the richest heiress in Bordeaux, where nothing was known of the constant shrinkage of her mother's capital, that lady having squandered enormous sums in order to prolong her reign. Magnificent parties and the continued maintenance of a regal establishment gave the public no reason for changing its former belief as to the wealth of the Evangélista family. Natalie's nineteenth birthday was drawing near, and no offer of marriage had as yet reached her mother's ear. Being accustomed to gratify her girlish caprices, Mademoiselle Evangélista wore cashmeres, had magnificent jewels, and lived in a luxurious style that terrified fortune-hunters, at a time and in a province where children were as skilful calculators as their parents. The fatal remark: "No one but a prince can afford to marry Mademoiselle Evangélista!" circulated

through the salons and the social coteries. Mothers of marriageable daughters, dowagers who had grandchildren to provide for, and the young women who were jealous of Natalie, whose never-failing refinement and tyrannical beauty sat heavily upon them, sedulously propagated this opinion by perfidious, envenomed slurs. If they heard an eligible youth remark with ecstatic admiration when Natalie entered a ball-room: "Mon Dieu, how lovely she is!" the mammas would reply: "Yes, but she's very expensive." If some newcomer thought Mademoiselle Evangélista charming and said that a man on the lookout for a wife could make no better choice, they would reply: "Who would be bold enough to marry a girl whose mother gives her a thousand francs a month for her toilette, who has horses and a lady's maid of her own, and wears lace? She has real mechlin on her peignoirs. The amount of her washing-bills would support a clerk's family. She has *pèlerines* for the morning that cost six francs to wash and iron."

Such remarks and a thousand others repeated over and over again, as if in flattery, would extinguish the most ardent desire any man could entertain to marry Mademoiselle Evangélista. Queen of all the balls, cloyed with the compliments and smiles that were showered upon her wherever she went, Natalie knew nothing of real life. She lived like the bird that flies, like the flower that blooms, always finding every one ready to gratify her wishes. She knew nothing of the value of things, she had no

idea where income came from, how it was kept up and made permanent. Perhaps she supposed that every family had its cooks, its coachmen, its lady's maids and its footmen, as the meadows have their grass and the trees their fruits. In her eyes, beggars and paupers, felled trees and unproductive land were the same thing. Pampered like a horse by her mother, fatigue never diminished her enjoyment. So she pranced about in society, like a race horse in the prairie, a race horse without curb or rein.

Six months after Paul's arrival, the aristocratic society of the city brought the *Fleur des Pois* and the queen of the ball-room together. These two flowers gazed at each other with apparent indifference, but each deemed the other charming. Madame Evangélista, intently watching the results of this preconcerted meeting, read in Paul's expression the thought that passed through his mind, and said to herself: "He shall be my son-in-law!" just as Paul said to himself when he saw Natalie: "She shall be my wife." The fortune of the Evangélistas, which had become proverbial in Bordeaux, had remained in Paul's mind as a reminiscence of his childhood, the most indelible of all reminiscences. Thus the suitability of the marriage from a pecuniary standpoint was established at once without any occasion for the discussions and investigations which arouse as much horror in timid as in proud minds. When certain persons undertook to make some eulogistic observations which it was impossible not to make concerning Natalie's speech and manners and

beauty, but which ended with a few cruel words as to future probabilities, apropos of the enormous expense of the Evangélista household, the *Fleur des Pois* made the disdainful reply that such petty provincialism deserved. This line of conduct, which was soon noised abroad, put a stop to the unkind remarks; for he set the pace in ideas and language, as well as in manners and fashions. He had imported the latest developments of British individualism, and its glacial barriers, the Byronic satire, the accusations against life, the contempt for sacred ties, together with English silver-plate and English jokes, the fashion of crying down the old provincial customs and things, the cigar, the boot-polish, the pony, the yellow gloves and the galop. So it came about that Paul's experience was the opposite of that of his predecessors: neither maiden nor dowager made any attempt to discourage him. Madame Evangélista began by giving several ceremonious dinner-parties for him. Could the *Fleur des Pois* fail to appear at functions which were attended by the most distinguished young men in the city? Notwithstanding Paul's affectation of indifference, which deceived neither mother nor daughter, he entered gradually upon the path leading to marriage. When Manerville was out driving in his tilbury or mounted on his high-bred horse, the young men would stop to look after him, and he would hear them say: "There's a lucky rascal; he's rich and good-looking, and they say he's going to marry Mademoiselle Evangélista. The world seems to

have been made for some people." When he met Madame Evangélista's calèche, he was proud of the marks of special favor contained in both the mother's and the daughter's salutation. Even if Paul had not been secretly in love with Mademoiselle Evangélista, society would certainly have married him to her in spite of himself. Society, which is never the cause of any good thing, is an accomplice in many disasters; and when it sees the evil it has fostered breaking from its shell, it denies it and takes its vengeance. The first society of Bordeaux, giving Mademoiselle Evangélista credit for a dowry of a million, handed it over to Paul without awaiting the consent of the parties, as is very often the case. Their fortunes were adapted to each other as perfectly as their persons. Paul was accustomed to the luxury and refinement amid which Natalie's life was passed. He had just arranged his own house for himself as no one else in Bordeaux would have arranged a house as a home for Natalie. Only a man accustomed to Parisian extravagance and to the caprices of Parisian women could steer clear of the pecuniary disasters likely to be caused by a marriage with this damsel, who was already as much of a Creole and as much of a great lady as her mother. In a position where a Bordeaux lover, in love with Mademoiselle Evangélista, would have been ruined, the Comte de Manerville, people said, would know how to avoid shipwreck. The marriage therefore was decided upon, and the members of the aristocratic royalist circle, when the subject

was mentioned before them, said pleasant things to Paul which tickled his vanity.

"Everyone here takes it for granted that you are to marry Mademoiselle Evangélista. If you do marry her you will do well; you'll never find such another lovely wife anywhere, not even at Paris; she is refined and graceful and she's a Casa-Réal through her mother. You will make the most charming couple in the world; you have the same tastes, the same conception of life, and you will have the pleasantest house in Bordeaux. Your wife needn't take anything to your house but her nightcap. In such matters, a house all furnished is as good as a *dot*. You are very lucky, too, to fall in with such a mother-in-law as Madame Evangélista. Such a bright, taking woman as she is will be of great assistance to you in the political career to which you doubtless look forward. She has sacrificed everything for her daughter, whom she adores, and Natalie will certainly be a good wife, for she loves her mother dearly. So you must arrange it without delay."

"That's all very fine," Paul would reply,—for despite his passion he chose to retain his independence,—"but we must arrange it properly."



Paul soon fell into the habit of calling at Madame Evangélista's, impelled by the necessity of finding employment for his leisure hours, a more difficult matter for him than for most men. There, only, were to be found the splendor and luxury to which he was accustomed. At forty years of age, Madame Evangélista was still beautiful with a beauty similar to that of a magnificent sunset at the close of a cloudless summer day. Her unsullied reputation afforded the Bordeaux gossips never-failing food for conversation, and the curiosity of the women was all the livelier because the widow's appearance gave every indication that she possessed the temperament that makes Spanish women and Creoles particularly famous. She had the black hair and eyes, the foot and the figure of a Spaniard, the excessively erect figure whose undulations are renowned in Spain. Her face, which was still beautiful, owed its peculiar charm to the Creole complexion, whose vitality can be described only by comparing it to muslin thrown over purple, its whiteness is so evenly shaded. She had a well-rounded figure, made attractive by her grace of movement, a combination of nonchalance and animation, of strength and freedom. Her manner was at once alluring and imposing, seductive but with no promise of anything to come. She was

tall, and could assume at will the air and carriage of a queen. Men were attracted by her conversation as birds by the bird-lime, for there was in her character the innate genius which necessity bestows upon schemers; she would go from one concession to another, arming herself with what was accorded her as a preliminary to asking for more, and she knew well how to interpose a safe distance when anything was asked of her in return. Although really ignorant, she had known the courts of Spain and Naples, the famous men of the two Americas, and several illustrious families in England and on the continent; from all of which she derived an amount of superficial information, that made her seem immensely well-informed. She received her guests with the good taste and the grandeur of manner which are not to be acquired, but seem to come as a second nature to certain innately refined minds which assimilate whatever is worth assimilating wherever they fall in with it. Although her reputation for virtue remained inexplicable, it served nevertheless to impart great authority to her acts, her words and her character. The daughter and mother entertained a genuine friendship for each other, outside of the natural filial and maternal affection. They were perfectly adapted to each other and their constant intercourse had never been marred by any clashing. Thus many people attributed Madame Evangélista's sacrifices to her maternal love. But, if Natalie was her mother's consolation in her persistent widowhood, it may be

that she was not its only motive. Madame Evangélista, it was said, had been in love with a man whose titles and peerage were restored to him by the second Restoration. This man, who would have been only too happy to marry Madame Evangélista in 1814, politely severed his relations with her in 1816. Madame Evangélista, to all appearance the mildest-mannered woman on earth, had in her character an alarming trait which can be explained only by citing Catharine de Medicis' motto: *Odiare e aspettare*—Hate and wait. Accustomed as she was to stand first, having always been obeyed, she resembled all royal personages: affable, mild, courteous, easy-going in the ordinary affairs of life, she was terrible, implacable, when her pride as a woman, as a Spaniard and as a Casa-Réal was wounded. She never forgave. She believed in the power of her hatred, she transformed it into an evil destiny hovering over her enemy's head. She had exerted that fatal power over the man who made a fool of her. The events which seemed to betray the influence of her *jettatura* confirmed her in her superstitious faith in herself. Although he was a minister and a peer of France he began to fall and was at last completely ruined. His property, his political and personal consideration, all were destined to destruction. The day came at last when Madame Evangélista, sitting proudly in her superb carriage, had the satisfaction of seeing him on foot in the Champs-Élysées, and of crushing him with a glance overflowing with triumphant sparks. This

misadventure had prevented her from marrying again, as it lasted two years. Later, her pride invariably drew comparisons between the men who offered themselves to her and the husband who had loved her so sincerely and so well. Thus, progressing from miscalculation to scheming, from hope to disillusionment, she had reached the age when women cease to have any other part to play in life than that of mother, sacrificing themselves to their daughters, transporting all their interests outside of themselves, upon the heads of a family, the last resting-place of human affections. Madame Evangélista speedily divined Paul's character and concealed her own from him. Paul was just the man she desired for a son-in-law, a responsible publisher of her future power. He belonged through his mother to the Maulincours, and the old Baronne de Maulincour, a friend of the Vidame de Pamiers, lived in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The baroness's grandson, Auguste de Maulincour, had a fine position. Therefore, Paul would be an excellent person to introduce the Evangélistas into Parisian society. The widow had known the Paris of the Empire, but only at long intervals, and she longed to be a shining figure in the Paris of the Restoration. There, only, were the elements of a political fortune, the only species of fortune which society women can properly assist in building up. Madame Evangélista, compelled by her husband's business to live at Bordeaux, had grown to dislike the place; she kept house there and everyone knows

how many obligations arise to embarrass a woman under those circumstances; but she no longer cared for Bordeaux, for she had exhausted its sources of enjoyment. She desired a larger stage as gamblers run to the table where the stakes are highest. In her own interest, therefore, she figured out a great destiny for Paul. She proposed to employ all the resources of her talent and her knowledge of life for the benefit of her son-in-law, in order that she might be able to taste the pleasures of power under his name. Many men are in this same way the screens of unseen female ambitions. Moreover, Madame Evangélista was interested in more than one way in taking possession of her daughter's husband. Paul was necessarily made captive by this woman, who found it all the easier to subjugate him because she seemed in no way desirous to exercise the slightest control over him. She used all her ascendancy, therefore, to aggrandize herself, to aggrandize her daughter and to give value to everything she possessed, in order to dominate in advance the man in whom she saw a means of continuing her aristocratic life. Paul's self-esteem waxed greater when he saw that he was appreciated by the mother and the daughter. He believed himself to be much cleverer than he really was, when he saw that his reflections and his lightest words were accorded great weight by Mademoiselle Evangélista, who would smile or toss her head knowingly, and by her mother whose flattery seemed always involuntary. These two women were so kind to him, he

was so sure of making himself agreeable to them, they managed him so deftly, holding him by the thread of his self-esteem, that he soon passed all his time at the Evangélista mansion.

A year after his arrival, Comte Paul, without having declared his intentions, was so attentive to Natalie that everybody considered that he was paying court to her. Neither mother nor daughter seemed to be thinking of marriage. Mademoiselle Evangélista treated him with the reserve of the great lady who knows how to be fascinating and who can talk pleasantly with a man without allowing him to advance one step toward intimacy. This policy of silence, so unusual with provincials, was exceedingly agreeable to Paul. Timid people are suspicious, abrupt suggestions startle them. They run away from happiness if it approaches with a great flourish of trumpets, and welcome misery if it comes upon them modestly, accompanied by soft shadows. And so Paul entangled himself when he saw that Madame Evangélista made no attempt to entangle him. The Spaniard enchanted him one evening by the remark that, with women of superior natures, just as with men, there comes a time when ambition takes the place of the earlier sentiments of life.

"That woman," Paul thought as he took his leave, "is quite capable of procuring a good embassy for me even before I am chosen deputy."

If a man does not, under any and all circumstances, walk about things or ideas in order to

examine them in all their different aspects, that man is weak and not fully equipped, and therefore in danger of falling by the wayside. At that moment Paul was optimistic: he saw his own advantage in everything, and did not say to himself that an ambitious mother-in-law might become a tyrant. And so, every evening, when he left the house he looked upon himself as married, he was fascinated by his own fancy, he gently drew on the nuptial slipper. In the first place, he had enjoyed his liberty too long to waste any regrets on it; he was tired of a bachelor's life which had nothing new to offer him, and he was conscious of nothing but its inconveniences; whereas, even if he did now and then think upon the disadvantages of marriage, he thought much more frequently of its pleasures; everything about it was new to him.

"Marriage," he said to himself, "is disagreeable only to people of small means; half of its woes disappear when one is rich."

Every day, therefore, some favorable thought swelled the list of the advantages he anticipated from this marriage.

"No matter how high I may rise, Natalie will always be adapted to the part she has to play," he would say to himself, "and that's no small merit in a woman. How many men of the Empire have I seen suffering horribly because of their wives! Isn't it one of the most important elements of happiness never to feel one's pride or one's vanity wounded by the companion one has chosen? A

man can never be altogether unhappy with a well-bred wife; she doesn't make him ridiculous and she knows how to be useful to him. Natalie would be a marvelously dignified hostess."

He thereupon brushed up his recollection as to the most distinguished ladies of Faubourg Saint-Germain, in order to convince himself that Natalie could, if not eclipse them, at least stand upon a footing of perfect equality with them. Every comparison resulted to Natalie's advantage. The conditions of comparison, drawn from Paul's imagination, adapted themselves to his wishes. Paris would have afforded him new characters to study every day, young women of different types of beauty, and the multiplicity of impressions would have left his reasoning powers well balanced; whereas at Bordeaux Natalie had no rivals, she was the only flower of her kind, and skilfully appeared at a moment when Paul was groaning under the tyranny of an idea to which most men succumb. Thus, their juxtaposition, added to the arguments of self-esteem and a genuine passion which had no other outlet than marriage, led Paul on to an unreasonable love which he had the good sense to keep secret even from himself, making himself believe that it was no more than a desire to be married. He even forced himself to study Mademoiselle Evangélista, as if he did not wish to compromise his future, for the terrible words of his friend De Marsay sometimes rumbled in his ears. But at the first glance, persons accustomed to luxurious living,

have an apparent simplicity which is very misleading: they despise it, they make use of it, it is an instrument and not the main object of their lives. Paul did not imagine, when he found the customs of these ladies so similar to his own, that they concealed a single cause of ruin. Then, too, although there may be some general rules to moderate the cares of married life, not one exists for divining or anticipating them. When unhappiness rears its head between two beings who have undertaken to make life pleasant to each other and easy to bear, it arises from the friction produced by constant intercourse which does not exist between two young unmarried people, and never will exist so long as French morals and laws are unchanged. Everything is deception between two beings who are on the point of joining company for life; but their deception is innocent, involuntary. Each of them necessarily appears in a favorable light; both are engaged in a struggle to assume the better attitude and they thereupon conceive a favorable idea of themselves to which later they are unable to respond. Real life, like the weather, contains a much larger proportion of the dull, gray moments which impart a sad aspect to nature, than of the moments when the sun shines and makes glad the earth. Young people see only the fine days. Later they attribute to marriage the miseries of life itself, for there is a tendency in man that leads him to seek the cause of his misfortunes in the persons or things in his immediate vicinity.

To detect in the attitude or the countenance, in the words or gestures of Mademoiselle Evangélista any signs that would have disclosed to him the sum total of imperfections which her character, like that of every human being, included, Paul must have possessed not only the science of Lavater and of Gall, but another science of which no text-book exists, the individual science of the keen observer which demands something very like universal knowledge. Like all young women, Natalie had an inscrutable face. The profound and serene tranquillity imprinted by sculptors on the faces of virgin figures intended to symbolize Justice, Innocence, any of the divinities that know nothing of earthly emotions—such tranquillity of feature is the greatest charm of a young girl; it is the sign-manual of her purity; nothing has as yet aroused her emotion; no shattered passion, no hope betrayed, has cast a shadow on the peaceful expression of her face; if it is feigned, the young girl has ceased to exist. Having never been separated from her mother, Natalie, like all Spanish girls, had received only a purely religious education, and some stray hints from mother to daughter, likely to be of use in the rôle she was to play. Her calmness of feature was therefore natural; but it formed a veil in which the woman was enveloped like the butterfly in its larva. Nevertheless, a man skilful in handling the scalpel of analysis, might have detected in Natalie some indication of the difficulties her character was likely to present when she was face

to face with conjugal or social life. Her truly remarkable beauty was due to extreme regularity of feature in harmony with the proportions of the head and body. Such physical perfection augurs ill for the mind. This is a rule to which there are few exceptions. Every superior nature has in its outward form some slight irregularities which become irresistible attractions, luminous points from which contrary sentiments shine forth, upon which the eye rests. Perfect harmony indicates coldness in all composite organizations. Natalie had the well-rounded figure that is a sign of strength, but an infallible indication of a will which often becomes obstinacy in persons whose intelligence is neither quick nor extensive. Her hands, like those of a Greek statue, confirmed the predictions of the face and figure, giving evidence of an illogical thirst for domination, of a tendency to exert her will for the sake of exerting it. Her eyebrows met, and observers say that that peculiarity indicates a leaning toward jealousy. In persons of lofty minds, jealousy becomes emulation and engenders great deeds; in small-minded persons it becomes hatred. Her mother's *Odiat e aspettate* was perceptible in her without disguise. Her eyes, apparently black, but really of an orange brown, were in striking contrast to her hair, which was of that light tawny color so prized by the Romans, called *auburn* in England, and which is almost always found upon children born of black-haired parents, as Monsieur and Madame Evangélista were. The delicate whiteness of

Natalie's complexion imparted an inexpressible charm to this contrast between her eyes and her hair, but the charm was purely external; for whenever the outlines of a face lack a certain smooth roundness, however finished and charming the details, do not deduce therefrom happy presages of the heart within. Those deceitful roses of youth shed their leaves, and after a few years you are surprised to find a harsh and barren soil where you formerly admired the profusion of noble qualities. Although there was something imposing in the contour of her face, Natalie's chin was slightly *thickened*, a painter's expression which may serve to explain the pre-existence of sentiments which were not to be displayed in all their violence until the middle of her life. Her mouth, which retreated a little, expressed uncompromising pride in harmony with the indications of her hand, her chin, her eyebrows and her lovely figure. Lastly,—and this diagnostic alone would have determined the judgment of a connoisseur,—Natalie's pure voice, seductive as it was, had a metallic ring. However deftly handled this copy organ might be, notwithstanding the grace with which it performed the scales and spirals of the hunting-horn, it denoted in its possessor the character of the Duke of Alva from whom the Casa-Réals descended in the collateral line. These various indications pointed to violent passions devoid of tenderness, sudden devoted friendships, irreconcilable enmities, a mind without intelligence and a thirst for domination natural enough in persons

who feel that their deserts fall below their pretensions. These faults, born of the temperament and the constitution, compensated, it may be, by the noble qualities of a rich strain of blood, were, in Natalie's case, buried like gold in the mine, and would not show their heads save under harsh treatment and as a result of the shocks that human nature is compelled to undergo in the world. At this moment, the grace and fresh bloom of youth, the distinction of her manners, her sacred ignorance, and her fascinating girlish ways, covered her peculiarities with a delicate varnish that necessarily deceived superficial minds. Then her mother had taught her, early in life, the secret of the pleasant prattle which plays at superiority, which answers objections with a joke, and fascinates by a graceful volubility beneath which a woman conceals the sandstone of her mind as nature disguises unfruitful soil beneath luxuriant ephemeral plants. In a word, Natalie had the charm of a spoiled child who has never known suffering: she attracted by her innocent frankness, and had not the solemn air which mothers impose upon their daughters, tracing out for them a programme of absurd tricks of manner and speech when the time comes for them to be married. She was light-hearted and genuine, like the maiden who knows nothing of marriage, looks forward to its delights only, anticipates no unhappiness and fancies that she is to acquire thereby the right always to have her own way. How could Paul, who loved as a man loves when his love is

increased by desire, have detected in a girl of this character, whose beauty fairly dazzled him, any suggestion of the sort of woman she would be at thirty, when even the shrewdest observers might have been deceived by appearances? Although happiness might be difficult of attainment in a marriage with this young woman, it was not out of the question. Through these faults which were still in germ some noble qualities shone. Beneath the hand of a skilful master, there is no good quality which, if thoroughly developed, does not neutralize faults, especially in the case of a young girl who loves. But to render ductile a woman naturally so unmalleable, the iron grasp of which De Marsay spoke to Paul was necessary. The Parisian dandy was right. Fear, inspired by love, is an infallible instrument with which to manage a woman's mind. She who loves, fears, and she who fears is nearer affection than hatred. Had Paul the self-possession, the good judgment, the resolution demanded for this silent struggle which an adroit husband must not allow his wife to suspect? And did Natalie love Paul? Like most young women, Natalie mistook for love the first impulses of instinct and the pleasure afforded her by Paul's external appearance, without knowing anything of the details of married life or of household affairs. In her eyes, the Comte de Manerville, apprentice in diplomacy, to whom all the courts of Europe were known, and one of the leaders of fashion in Paris, could be no ordinary man, destitute of moral strength, at once timid and

brave, energetic, if you will, in adversity, but defenceless against the ennui which destroys the savor of happiness. Would she in the future have the tact to distinguish Paul's estimable qualities from among his trifling faults? Would she not rather exaggerate the one and overlook the other, according to the custom of young women who know nothing of life? There is an age at which a woman condones the vices of a man who saves her from petty vexations, and at which she looks upon petty vexations as disasters. What conciliatory force, what ripe experience would support and enlighten this young household? Would not Paul and his wife believe that they loved each other when, in fact, they had never gone beyond the little meaningless caresses which young women indulge in at the beginning of their married life, the compliments which husbands pay on returning from the ball when they still have the courteous ways induced by desire? Under those circumstances, would not Paul submit to his wife's tyranny instead of founding his own empire? Would Paul know how to say: "No?" There was danger on every side for the weak man in a situation where the strongest man would perhaps have incurred some risk.

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The subject of this study is not the transition from bachelorhood to the marriage state—a subject which, if broadly treated, would not lack the attraction which the internal strife of our sentiments imparts to the most commonplace details of life. The events and the ideas which brought about Paul's union with Mademoiselle Evangélista are an introduction to the work itself, whose aim is simply to depict the great comedy which precedes every marriage ceremony. Hitherto this scene has been neglected by dramatic authors, although it presents a novel field for their energy.

The scene to which we refer, which exercised a controlling influence over Paul's future, and which Madame Evangélista anticipated with alarm, is the discussion occasioned by marriage contracts in all families, noble or bourgeois; for the human passions are as violently excited by small interests as by great. These comedies enacted in a notary's presence all resemble in a greater or less degree the one here described, the interest of which will be found therefore not so much in the pages of this book as in the memories of married people.

At the beginning of the winter of 1822, Paul de Manerville caused a formal request to be made for Mademoiselle Evangélista's hand by his great-aunt, Baronne de Maulincour. Although the baroness

never passed more than two months in Médoc, she remained there until the end of October to assist her grand-nephew in this matter and to play the part of a mother. Having broached the subject to Madame Evangélista, the aunt, an experienced old lady, informed Paul of the result of her embassy.

"My child," said she, "your business is all done. Upon talking over money matters I found out that Madame Evangélista would give nothing to her daughter on her own account. Mademoiselle Natalie marries with what property she has at her own disposal. Marry, my boy! Men who have a name and estates to hand down, a race to keep up, must come to it sooner or later. I would like to see my dear Auguste take the same course. You can be married without me, for I have only my blessing to give you, and women as old as I am have no business at weddings. So I will be off for Paris to-morrow. When you present your wife in society, I can see her at my house much more conveniently than here. If you hadn't a house at Paris, you could have found a place to lay your head under my roof, and I would have been glad to arrange the second floor of my house for you."

"Thank you, dear aunt," said Paul. "But what do you mean by the words: 'Her mother gives her nothing on her own account; she marries with what property she has at her own disposal?'"

"The mother, my child, is a sly creature who takes advantage of her daughter's beauty to impose conditions and to leave you only what she can't take

away, that is, the father's fortune. We old people lay a good deal of stress on the 'What has he?' and the 'What has she?' I advise you to give careful instructions to your notary. The contract, my child, is the most sacred of duties. If your father and mother hadn't made their bed well, you would be without sheets to-day, perhaps. You will have children, they are the most common results of marriage, and you must think of them. See Master Mathias, our old notary."

Madame de Maulincour took her departure leaving Paul plunged in deep perplexity. His mother-in-law was a sly creature! He must fight for his interests in the contract and necessarily defend them: why, who was likely to attack them? He followed his aunt's advice and entrusted to Master Mathias the duty of drawing up the contract. But those prospective discussions engrossed his thoughts. So it was with lively emotion that he entered Madame Evangélista's house when he went thither to declare his intentions. Like all timid people, he trembled at the thought of allowing the suspicions his aunt had suggested to him, and which seemed to him insulting, to be detected in his manner. To avoid the slightest unpleasantness with a person so imposing as his future mother-in-law was to him, he invented one of the circumlocutions that come natural to persons who dare not approach a difficulty in front.

"Madame," he began, seizing a moment when Natalie had left the room, "you know what a family notary is: mine is an honest old fellow who would

really be terribly grieved not to be employed to prepare my contract of—”

“What’s that, my dear?” Madame Evangélista interrupted; “why, aren’t our marriage-contracts always prepared by the co-operation of notaries of both families?”

During the time that had elapsed before Paul approached this question, Madame Evangélista had been asking herself: “What is he thinking about?” for women possess in a superlative degree, the art of reading thoughts in the play of the features. She divined the great-aunt’s suggestions in the embarrassed expression, the trembling voice which betrayed Paul’s interior conflict.

“At last,” she thought, “the fatal day has arrived, the crisis is beginning; what will be the result?—Monsieur Solonet is my notary,” she said after a pause, “Monsieur Mathias is yours; I will invite them to dine here to-morrow and they will come to an understanding in the matter. Isn’t it their business to reconcile conflicting interests without our having a hand in it, just as our cooks are expected to provide us with good dinners?”

“You are quite right,” he replied, with an almost imperceptible sigh of satisfaction.

By a strange interchange of rôles, Paul, who was innocent of all blame, trembled, and Madame Evangélista was apparently calm, although undergoing horrible anxiety. The widow owed her daughter a third of the fortune left by Monsieur Evangélista, twelve hundred thousand francs, and was entirely

unable to pay the debt, even by stripping herself of everything she possessed. She would therefore be at her son-in-law's mercy. Even if she could master Paul alone, would he, when enlightened by his notary, agree to a compromise in the matter of her accounts as guardian? If he should withdraw, all Bordeaux would know the reason, and Natalie's marriage would become an impossibility. This mother, who desired her daughter's happiness, this woman, who from her birth had lived an honorable life, reflected that, on the following day, it would be necessary for her to become dishonest. Like the great captain who longs to expunge from his life the moment when he was, in secret, a coward, she would have liked to expunge that day from the number of her days. Certain it is that portions of her hair turned white during the night, when, face to face with the facts, she reproached herself for her recklessness, as she realized the stern necessities of her position. In the first place, she was obliged to make a confidant of her notary, to whom she wrote requesting him to call upon her at her hour for rising. She was obliged to confess to a secret distress which she had never been willing to confess to herself, for she had gone on toward the abyss, always relying upon one of the lucky chances which never arrive. There arose in her heart a slight feeling against Paul, in which there was neither hatred nor aversion; but was he not the adverse party in this secret lawsuit? had he not become, without knowing it, an innocent foe whom it was necessary to

overcome? What mortal has ever been able to love his dupe? Compelled to resort to stratagem, the Spaniard resolved, like all women, to display her superiority in this contest, the shame of which could be compensated only by a complete victory. In the silence of the night, she excused herself by a process of reasoning in which her pride held the upper hand. Had not Natalie profited by her extravagance? Had her conduct been influenced by a single one of those base and sordid motives that befoul the mind? She did not know how to reckon, but was that a sin, a crime? Was not a man only too fortunate to win a girl like Natalie? Was not the treasure she had preserved worth a receipt in full? Did not many men purchase the women they loved by sacrifices innumerable? Why should one do less for a lawful wife than for a courtesan? Moreover, Paul was a nobody, an incapable creature; she would display for his benefit all the resources of her intellect, through her, he should cut a wide swath in the world;—he would be indebted to her for his power; would she not in that way amply repay her debt some day? He would be a fool to hesitate! Hesitate for a few crowns more or less!—It would be infamous.

“If I am not immediately successful,” she said to herself, “I will leave Bordeaux, and I can at any time provide handsomely for Natalie by turning all I have left into money, house, diamonds, furniture, and giving it all to her, reserving only a pension for myself.”

When a stoutly tempered mind constructs for itself a place of retirement like Richelieu's at Brouage, and projects a grandiose finale, its plans become a sort of lever, which assists it to triumph. The thought of this theatrical dénouement, in case of disaster, comforted Madame Evangélista, who went to sleep, feeling also much confidence in her second in the approaching duel. She relied greatly upon the assistance of the shrewdest notary in Bordeaux, Monsieur Solonet, a young man of twenty-seven, decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honor for having actively contributed to bring about the second return of the Bourbons. Happy and proud to be received in Madame Evangélista's house, less as a notary than as belonging to the royalist circle of Bordeaux, Solonet had conceived for that superb sunset one of those ardent passions which women like Madame Evangélista repulse, but by which they are flattered, and which the most prudish of them leave on the surface of the water. Solonet maintained a self-satisfied attitude, full of respect and of very decorous hope.

The notary came the next morning with the eager haste of a slave, and was received by the coquettish widow in her bedroom in the disarray of an expert.

"Can I," she began, "rely upon your discretion and your entire devotion to my interests in the discussion that will take place this evening? You have guessed that the subject is my daughter's marriage contract."

The young man outdid himself in gallant protestations.

"To business," said she.

"I am listening," he replied, apparently collecting his faculties.

Madame Evangélista laid the position of affairs before him without disguise.

"My dear madame, that is nothing," said Master Solonet, assuming a self-sufficient air when Madame Evangélista had given him exact figures. "On what terms are you with Monsieur de Manerville? In this matter, moral questions overshadow legal and financial questions."

Madame Evangélista gathered the robes of her superiority about her. The young notary learned with keen delight that up to that time his client had maintained a most lofty and dignified bearing in her relations with Paul; that, partly from genuine pride and partly from instinctive caution, she had always acted as if the Comte de Manerville were her inferior, as if it were an honor for him to marry Mademoiselle Evangélista; neither she nor her daughter could be suspected of having interested views; their sentiments seemed free from all taint of sordidness; at the first suggestion of a financial difficulty by Paul, they had the right to fly away an immeasurable distance; in short, she had an insurmountable ascendancy over her future son-in-law.

"That being so," said Solonet, "what are the utmost concessions you are willing to make?"

"I want to make as few as possible," she said, with a laugh.

"A woman's answer," cried Solonet. "Madame, are you bent upon having Mademoiselle Natalie married?"

"Yes."

"And you wish a release for eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs which your guardian's account, to be presented to the said son-in-law, will show you to be owing?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want to keep?"

"Thirty thousand a year at least," she replied.

"We must conquer or die?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will think over the necessary means of attaining that end, for we must be very wary and husband our forces. I will give you certain instructions when I arrive; follow them exactly, and I can even now predict complete success.—Does Comte Paul love Mademoiselle Natalie?" he asked as he rose to go.

"He adores her."

"That's not enough. Does he desire her, as a woman, sufficiently to overlook some pecuniary shortcomings?"

"Yes."

"That's what I call an item on the credit side of a girl's books!" cried the notary. "Make her very beautiful this evening," he added, sily.

"We have the prettiest dress you can imagine."

"In my mind, the dress worn for the signing of the contract is worth half the provisions," said Solonet.

This last argument seemed so important to Madame Evangélista that she chose to assist at Natalie's toilette, as much for the purpose of watching her as to make her an innocent accomplice in her financial conspiracy. Arrayed in a gown of white cashmere trimmed with pink ribbons, with her hair dressed à la Sévigné, her daughter appeared so lovely in her eyes that she felt certain of victory. When the maid had left the room, and Madame Evangélista was sure that no one could be within earshot, she arranged a few curls in her daughter's headdress by way of exordium.

"My dear child, do you love Monsieur de Manerville sincerely?" she said, in a voice that betrayed no weakness.

The mother and daughter exchanged a peculiar glance.

"Why do you ask me that question to-day rather than yesterday, little mother? Why did you let him see me?"

"If it would necessitate our parting for ever, would you persist in this marriage?"

"I would abandon it and not die of grief."

"You do not love him, my dear," said the mother, kissing her child on the forehead.

"But why are you playing the grand inquisitor, dear mother?"

"I was anxious to know if you were bent upon

the marriage without being mad over the husband."

"I love him."

"You are right; he is a count and we will make him a peer of France between us; but there are going to be obstacles in the way."

"Obstacles between people who love each other? No. The *Fleur des Pois*, dear mother, is too firmly planted here," she said, pointing to her heart with a pretty gesture, "to make the slightest objection. I am sure of it."

"Suppose it should turn out otherwise?" said Madame Evangélista.

"He would be utterly forgotten," was Natalie's reply.

"Good. You are a Casa-Réal! But, although he loves you like a madman, if there should be a dispute to which he was not a party, and which it was necessary that he should overlook, for your sake as well as for mine, Natalie, eh? and if, without offending the proprieties, a little touch of coquetry in your manner should turn the scale? A mere nothing, you know, just a word? Men are made that way, they'll hold out against a serious argument, and fall under a glance."

"I understand! a little tap to make Favori leap the fence," said Natalie, going through the gesture of striking her horse with her whip.

"My angel, I don't ask you to do anything that resembles seduction. We have the old Castilian sense of honor that doesn't permit us to go

beyond bounds. Comte Paul will understand my position."

"What position?"

"You wouldn't understand anything about it. But if, after he has seen you in all your glory, his face should betray the slightest hesitation, and I should notice it! upon my word, I would break it all off on the instant, I would very soon turn my property into money, leave Bordeaux, and go to Douai to the Claës, who, in spite of everything, are connected with us by their alliance with the Temnincks. Then I would marry you to a peer of France, even if I had to take refuge in a convent in order to give you all my fortune."

"Mother, tell me what I must do to prevent such misery?" said Natalie.

"I never saw you so lovely, my child! Be a bit of a flirt and all will go well."

Madame Evangélista left Natalie deep in thought and went to make a toilette which would enable her to sustain a comparison with her daughter. If Natalie was to make herself attractive to Paul, must not the widow inflame the ardor of Solonet, her champion? The mother and daughter were both under arms when Paul came to bring the bouquet he had been for some months in the habit of presenting to Natalie every day. Then all three began to talk, awaiting the arrival of the two notaries.



This day was to Paul the first skirmish in that long and wearisome war called marriage. It becomes necessary, therefore, to state the strength of the forces on each side, the position of the belligerent armies and the ground on which they were to manœuvre. To maintain a conflict, the importance of which entirely escaped his perception, Paul's sole defender was his old notary, Mathias. Both of them were to be taken by surprise by an unexpected occurrence, hard pressed by an enemy whose plan of attack was already made, and forced to make up their minds without time for reflection. Even with the assistance of Cujas and Barthole themselves, what man would not have succumbed? How can one suspect perfidy where everything seems natural and open? What could Mathias do single-handed against Madame Evangélista, Solonet and Natalie, especially when his love-lorn client went over to the enemy as soon as obstacles arose and menaced his happiness? Paul was already entangling himself in the net by whispering the sweet words in common use between lovers, but to which his passion imparted enormous value in the eyes of Madame Evangélista, who did her best to make him compromise himself.

Those matrimonial *condottieri* who went forth to do battle for their clients, and whose respective

individual powers became so decisive a factor in this solemn conclave, the two notaries represented the old and new customs of the profession, the old and the new race of notaries.

Master Mathias was an old worthy of sixty-nine years, who prided himself upon having held his commission twenty years. His great gouty feet were encased in shoes adorned with silver clasps and made absurd appendages to a pair of legs so thin and knees so prominent, that when he crossed them, one would have taken them for the two bones engraved above the *Here lies* in a cemetery. His thin little thighs, lost in broad black breeches with knee-buckles, seemed to bend beneath the weight of a round paunch and a torso developed like the chests of all men who pass their lives in offices,—a great ball always packed up in a green coat with square skirts, which no one could remember having seen when it was new. His hair, well-brushed and powdered, came together behind in a little rat-tail that was forever caught between the collar of his coat and that of his flowered white waistcoat. With his round head, his face of the color of a vine-leaf, his blue eyes, his trumpet-shaped nose, a mouth with thick lips and a double chin, the dear little man, wherever he appeared in places where he was not known, excited the merriment generously bestowed by the French on the absurd creations which nature sometimes indulges in, which art amuses itself by copying, and which we call caricatures. But in Master Mathias, mind had triumphed over shape,

the qualities of the heart had conquered the singularities of the body. The greater part of the Borelais treated him with respectful friendliness, with deference replete with esteem. The notary's voice won the heart by appealing to it in the eloquent tones of probity. He knew no other ruse than to go straight to the facts, brushing away all evil thoughts by searching questions. His quick perception, his great experience gave him that power of divination that permits its possessor to go to the bottom of men's consciences and read there their secret thoughts. Although solemn and sedate in business, the patriarch had the jovial nature of our ancestors. He would venture a ballad at table, promote and maintain family festivities, celebrate the birthdays of grandmothers and children, burn the Yule log with due ceremony; he loved to give New Year's gifts, to invent surprises, and distribute eggs at Easter; he believed in the obligations of a godfather and he clung to all the customs that gave color to the life of days gone by. Master Mathias was a noble and venerable relic of the notaries, grand though obscure men, who gave no receipt when they accepted millions for safe-keeping, but returned them in the same bags, tied with the same strings; who executed obligations of trust to the letter, prepared inventories in proper form, interested themselves like second fathers in the affairs of their clients, sometimes put up the bars before spend-thrifts, and to whom families entrusted their secrets; who deemed themselves responsible for errors in the

instruments they prepared and meditated long upon them. Never in his notarial life had one of his clients had occasion to complain of a bad investment, of a mortgage unwisely accepted or unwisely administered. His fortune, slowly but honestly acquired, came to him only after thirty years of labor and economy. He had set up in business fourteen of his clerks. Religious and generous *incognito*, Mathias was to be found wherever good work was to be done without a salary. He was an active member of the committees on hospitals and on benevolent work, and he was always the largest subscriber to funds for the relief of persons suffering from sudden disaster, or for the creation of any useful institution. So it was that neither he nor his wife had a carriage, that his word was held sacred, that his vaults contained as large sums as those of the Bank, that he was called *Good Mathias*, and that when he died, his funeral was attended by three thousand persons.

Solonet was the type of the young notary who enters the room humming a tune, who affects a jaunty air, and tells you that a man can attend to business just as well laughing as with a sober face; the notary who is a captain in the National Guard, who loses his temper if he is taken for a notary and is a candidate for the Cross of the Legion of Honor, who has his carriage and leaves the verification of documents to his clerks; the notary who goes to balls and the theatre, buys pictures and plays *écarté*, who has a strong-box into which all sums deposited

with him are poured, and returns in bank-notes what he has received in gold; the notary who progresses with his age and risks capital in doubtful investments, speculates, and intends to retire with thirty thousand francs a year after ten years in the profession; the notary whose knowledge comes from his duplicity, but whom many people fear as an accomplice who knows their secrets; the notary who sees in his office a means of marrying some blue-stocking heiress.

When the fair-haired, slender Solonet, curled and scented and booted like a *jeune premier* at the Vaudeville, and dressed like a dandy whose most pressing business is a duel, entered the room in advance of his elderly confrère, who was delayed by a twinge of the gout, the two men represented in real life one of the caricatures entitled THEN AND NOW which achieved such a success under the Empire. If Madame and Mademoiselle Evangélista, to whom *Good Monsieur Mathias* was a stranger, were conscious at first of some slight desire to laugh, they were touched the next moment by the grace with which he complimented them. The excellent man's words breathed the kindness which benignant old men impart to their ideas as well as to their manner of expressing them. The young notary, of the sprightly manner, at that moment was at a disadvantage. Mathias manifested his superior breeding by the circumspection with which he accosted Paul. Without compromising the dignity of his gray hairs, he showed due respect for the younger man's noble

birth, knowing that some honors are due to old age and that all social rights are reciprocal. On the other hand, Solonet's bow and salutation expressed a consciousness of perfect equality which was calculated to give offense to the pretensions of social magnates and to make him ridiculous in the eyes of persons of genuine nobility. The young notary beckoned to Madame Evangélista in a very familiar way to come and talk with him in a window recess. For a few moments they talked together in whispers, laughing aloud now and then, for the purpose, doubtless, of misleading the others as to the importance of their conversation, wherein Master Solonet imparted his plan of battle to his sovereign.

"But," said he in conclusion, "shall you have the courage to sell your house?"

"Most certainly," said she.

Madame Evangélista did not choose to tell her notary the secret of her heroism, which made a deep impression upon him: Solonet's zeal would have been quite likely to grow cold, had he known that his client proposed to leave Bordeaux. She had not mentioned her purpose even to Paul, in order not to alarm him by the extent of circumvallation required as a part of the first outworks of a political life.



After dinner, the plenipotentiaries left the lovers with the mother, and retired to an adjoining salon where their conference was to take place. Thereupon a twofold scene was enacted: in the chimney-corner in the large salon a love-scene wherein life assumed a joyous, laughing expression; in the other room, a grave and gloomy scene where pecuniary interests, laid bare to the sight, played in anticipation the part that they eventually play beneath life's rosy exterior.

"My dear master," said Solonet to Mathias, "the contract will remain in your office; I know the respect I owe my senior."

Mathias bowed gravely.

"But," continued Solonet, unfolding a draft of a contract intended for effect only, which one of his clerks had drawn up, "as we are the oppressed party, as we are the lady, I have had the contract drawn up in order to save you the trouble. We marry with our respective rights, on the theory of common ownership; either party to inherit the whole in case of the other's death without an heir; otherwise to inherit one-fourth outright and a life interest in another fourth; the amount to be held in common will be one-fourth of the respective contributions; the survivor to keep the personal

property without being held to furnish an inventory. It's all as simple as good-day."

"Ta ta ta ta," said Mathias, "I don't do business as one sings a chanson. What are your rights?"

"What are yours?" said Solonet.

"Our marriage portion," said Mathias, "is the estate of Lanstrac, which produces twenty-three thousand francs a year in cash, to say nothing of the rents paid in kind. *Item*, the farms of Grassol and Guadet, worth three thousand six hundred a year each. *Item*, the vineyard of Bellerose, which averages sixteen thousand a year: total, forty-six thousand two hundred a year. *Item*, the patrimonial mansion at Bordeaux, on which the tax is nine hundred francs. *Item*, a fine house with courtyard and garden, on Rue de la Pépinière, Paris, taxed at fifteen hundred francs. These several properties, of which the title-deeds are at my office, come to us by inheritance from our father and mother, except the house at Paris, which is a purchase of our own. We have also to include the furniture of our two houses and that of the Château de Lanstrac, the whole estimated at four hundred and fifty thousand francs. There we have the table, the table linen and the first course. What do you offer for the second course and the dessert?"

"Our rights," said Solonet.

"Specify them, my dear master," rejoined Mathias. "What do you offer me? where is the inventory made after Monsieur Evangélista's decease? Show me the settlement, and how the funds

SOLONET AND MATHIAS

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are invested. Where's your capital, if there is any capital? where are your estates, if there are any estates? In a word, show us your guardian's account, and tell us what your mother gives you or promises to give you."

"Does Monsieur le Comte de Manerville love Mademoiselle Evangélista?"

"He wishes to make her his wife, if everything is all right," said the old notary. "I'm not a child; our interests are the point at issue now and not our sentiments."

"The whole affair falls through unless your sentiments are generous; for this reason," rejoined Solonet. "We made no inventory after our husband's death, for we were Spanish, Creole, and didn't understand French laws. Further than that, we were too grief-stricken to think of the wretched formalities to which unfeeling hearts give their attention. It is a notorious fact that we were adored by the deceased and that we mourned his loss excessively. If we have a settlement preceded by an apology for an inventory made up from common report, you can thank our substitute guardian for it, who forced us to state our position and to settle a fortune of some sort on our daughter, just when we were compelled to withdraw from London an enormous amount invested in English consols, in order to reinvest it in Paris, where we doubled the income."

"Don't talk nonsense to me. There are ways of verifying your statements. What succession did

you pay to the exchequer? The amount will be enough to settle the account. Come straight to the facts. Tell us frankly what you originally had and what remains. If we are too much in love, we'll see."

"If you marry us for our money, you can go to the devil. We are entitled to more than a million; but our mother has nothing left but this house, its furnishings and four hundred and some odd thousand francs, invested about 1817 in the five per cents, yielding forty thousand francs a year."

"How do you manage to live at the rate of a hundred thousand?" cried Mathias, aghast.

"Our daughter has cost us a ruinous outlay. Besides, we love to spend money. Come, your jeremiads won't help us to find two liards."

"With the fifty thousand a year belonging to Mademoiselle Natalie, you could have brought her up in luxury without ruining yourself. But if you have eaten so greedily while you were a girl, won't you be all the greedier when you're a wife?"

"Let us alone then," said Solonet; "the prettiest girl in the world ought always to spend more than she has."

"I'll go and say a word to my client," replied the old notary.

"Go on, my old father Cassandra, go and tell your client we haven't a sou," thought Master Solonet, who, in the silence of his office, had strategically arranged his forces, drawn up his propositions in echelons, detailed the parties to

turn the flank of the discussion, and prepared for the moment when the adversaries, deeming everything lost, should find themselves in a position to effect a happy compromise in which his client would triumph.

*

The white dress with pink ribbons, the corkscrew curls à la Sévigné, Natalie's tiny foot, her sly glances, her pretty hand incessantly busied in repairing the disorder of curls that were not disarranged, the manœuvring of a young girl spreading her feathers like a peacock in the sunshine, had brought Paul to the point where his future mother-in-law desired to see him: he was drunken with desire, and longed for his betrothed as a student for a courtesan; his glances, a sure thermometer of the heart, indicated that degree of passion at which a man commits innumerable follies.

"Natalie is so lovely," he said in his mother-in-law's ear, "that I can understand the frenzy that drives a man to purchase pleasure with death."

Madame Evangélista shook her head.

"Lovers' talk! my husband never said any of those fine things to me; but he married me without fortune, and in thirteen years he never caused me one moment's sorrow."

"Do you mean that as a lesson for me?" laughed Paul.

"You know how I love you, my dear child!" said she, pressing his hand. "For must I not love you dearly to give you my Natalie?"

"Give me! give me!" exclaimed the girl, laughing and waving a hand-screen made from the

feathers of tropical birds. "What are you whispering about there?"

"I was telling her how much I love you," replied Paul, "as propriety forbids me to express my desires to you."

"Why?"

"I'm afraid of myself."

"Oh! you're too bright not to know how to set the jewels of flattery. Would you like to know my opinion of you?—Well, I think you're wittier than a man in love ought to be. To be the *Fleur des Pois*, and to continue to be very clever," she said, lowering her eyes, "is to have too many advantages on your side: a man ought to choose. I'm afraid, too!"

"Afraid of what?"

"Let's not talk in this strain.—Don't you think, mother, that such conversation is dangerous when our contract isn't signed?"

"It will be directly," said Paul.

"I'd like to know what Achilles and Nestor are saying to each other," said Natalie, glancing at the door of the small salon with childish curiosity.

"They're talking about our children, our deaths, and Heaven knows what other similar nonsense; they're counting up our crowns so as to tell us if we can still keep five horses in the stable. They're also busying themselves about our respective donations to each other, but I've anticipated them."

"How?" queried Natalie.

"Haven't I already given my whole self?" said he, gazing at the girl, whose beauty redoubled as the

pleasure caused by this reply brought a flush to her cheeks.

"Mother, how can I show my gratitude for such generosity?"

"My dear child, haven't you your whole life to repay him? Isn't it heaping inexhaustible treasures upon a man to know the secret of making him happy every day? I had no other treasure for my dowry."

"Do you like Lanstrac?" Paul asked Natalie.

"How could I fail to like anything of yours?" said she. "That is why I would like to see your house."

"*Our* house," said Paul. "You are anxious to know if I have anticipated your tastes, and if you will be happy there. Your mother has made your husband's task a hard one, you have always been so happy; but, when love is infinite, it knows no impossibility."

"Dear children," said Madame Evangélista, "can you remain in Bordeaux during the early days of your marriage? If you feel that you have the courage to defy the people who know you, spy upon your actions and embarrass you, so be it! But if you both have the feeling of modesty that remains buried in the heart and never finds outward expression, we will go to Paris, where the life of a young couple is lost to sight in the torrent. There only can you live like two lovers, with no reason to fear ridicule."

"You are right, mother, I didn't think of that. But I shall hardly have time to get my house ready.

I will write to-night to De Marsay, the only one of my friends I can rely upon, to hurry up the workmen."

Just as Paul, like all young men who are accustomed to gratify their whims without first reckoning the cost, was rashly involving himself in the expense of a sojourn in Paris, Master Mathias entered the salon and motioned to his client to come and speak with him.

"What is it, my friend?" said Paul submitting to be led aside.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the worthy man, "there's not a sou of dowry. My advice is to postpone the conference to another day, so that you can make up your mind as to the proper course to pursue."

"Monsieur Paul," Natalie interposed, "I also would like my little word with you in private."

Although Madame Evangélista's face was calm, never did Jew in the Middle Ages suffer greater martyrdom in his caldron filled with boiling oil, than she was suffering in her dress of violet velvet. Solonet had given her his word that the marriage should take place, but she knew nothing as to the means or conditions of success, and was undergoing the horrible anguish of contemplating the possible alternatives. She owed her triumph perhaps to her daughter's disobedience. Natalie had closely observed her mother's words, for her anxiety was clearly perceptible to her. When she saw the success of her coquetry, she was conscious of a

thousand contradictory feelings. Without blaming her mother she was half-ashamed of this manœuvring, whatever there was to gain by it. Then she was seized with a jealous curiosity not difficult to understand. She was anxious to know if Paul loved her enough to overcome the difficulties anticipated by her mother, and which the somewhat clouded brow of Master Mathias seemed to foreshadow. These feelings impelled her to yield to a loyal impulse, which by the way, placed her in a most favorable light. The blackest treachery would have been less dangerous than her innocence.

"Paul," she said in an undertone—and it was the first time she had called him by his name,—“if any difficulties about money matters are destined to separate us, remember that I release you from your engagement, and authorize you to throw upon me whatever blame might attach to a rupture.”

She gave expression to her generosity with such lofty dignity, that Paul believed in her disinterestedness, in her ignorance of the fact his notary had just disclosed to him; he pressed her hand and kissed it with the fervor of a man to whom love is dearer than his material interests. Natalie left the room.

“*Sac à papier!* Monsieur le Comte, you’re acting foolishly,” grumbled the old notary, rejoining his client.

Paul was lost in thought; he had expected to have an income of about a hundred thousand francs from his own fortune and Natalie’s combined, and

however passionately in love a man may be, he does not without some emotion come down from a hundred to forty-six thousand francs a year, when he is about to marry a woman accustomed to luxurious living.

"My daughter isn't here," said Madame Evangélista, approaching her son-in-law and the notary with a queenly step; "can you tell me what is going on?"

"Madame,"—Mathias, alarmed at Paul's silence, broke the ice,—"a difficulty has arisen that makes a postponement necessary—"

As he spoke, Master Solonet came out of the small salon and cut his older confrère short with a phrase which restored Paul to life. Crushed by the recollection of the fervent words he had used and his amorous attitude, Paul did not know how to retract or change them; he would have been glad to throw himself into the bottomless pit.

"There's one way in which madame can square accounts with her daughter," said the young notary, airily. "Madame Evangélista has forty thousand francs a year in five per cent government obligations, which will soon be at par if they don't go beyond it; so that we can reckon the principal at eight hundred thousand francs. This house and the garden belonging to it are easily worth two hundred thousand. If that is satisfactory, madame can transfer the reversion of these properties to her daughter in the contract, for I don't suppose monsieur desires to leave his mother-in-law entirely

penniless. If madame has used up her own fortune, she restores her daughter's, almost to a sou."

"We women are very unfortunate to understand nothing about business," said Madame Evangélista. "I have reversions, you say? In heaven's name, what are they?"

Paul listened to this proposed compromise in a sort of trance. The old notary, seeing the snare that was laid and that his client already had one foot entangled in it, stood as if turned to stone, saying to himself:

"I believe they're making fools of us!"

"If madame follows my advice, she will make sure of her tranquillity," continued the young notary. "If she sacrifices herself, she will at least be free from any annoyance from minor children. No one knows who's going to live or who's going to die! Monsieur le Comte then will acknowledge in the contract the receipt of the total amount due Mademoiselle Evangélista from her father's estate."

Mathias could not restrain the indignation that sparkled in his eyes and brought the blood to his face.

"And that amount," he said, trembling, "is—?"

"One million one hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, according to the—"

"Why don't you ask Monsieur le Comte to turn over his fortune to his future wife *hic et nunc*?" said Mathias. "That would be more straightforward than what you do ask of us. The Comte de Manerville shall not be ruined in my presence; I retire."

He walked toward the door to inform his client of the gravity of the situation; but he returned and said, addressing Madame Evangélista:

"Do not think, madame, that I hold you jointly responsible for my confrère's ideas; I look upon you as an honorable woman, a great lady who knows nothing of business."

"Thanks, my dear confrère," said Solonet.

"You are well aware that there can be no such thing as an insult between us," Mathias replied.—

"Madame, be sure at least that you understand the result of these stipulations. You are still young enough and lovely enough to marry again. Oh! mon Dieu, madame," the old man added at a gesture from Madame Evangélista, "who can answer for himself?"

"I did not believe, monsieur," she replied, "that, after remaining a widow seven of the best years of my life, and refusing brilliant matches for love of my daughter, I should be suspected of such folly at thirty-nine! If we were not talking business, I should look upon such a supposition as impertinent."

"Would it not be more impertinent to think that you could not marry again?"

"To be willing and to be able are two very different things," said Solonet, gallantly.

"Very well," said Master Mathias, "let's say no more about your marriage. You may, and we all hope you will, live forty-five years longer. Now, as you propose to keep for yourself the usufruct of

Monsieur Evangélista's fortune, your children, I suppose, are to lay their teeth on the shelf while you live."

"What does that expression mean?" said the widow. "What do you mean by your *shelf* and your *usufruct*?"

Solonet, the man of taste and refinement, began to laugh.

"I'll translate it," replied the notary. "If your children are wise, they'll think of the future. To think of the future is to lay by half their income, supposing them to have only two children, who must have, in the first place, a fine education and then a good round dowry. Your daughter and son-in-law will thus be reduced to twenty thousand francs a year, when each of them spent fifty before being married at all. That is nothing. Some day my client must account to his children for eleven hundred thousand francs belonging to their mother, although he will never have received them himself if his wife is dead and madame is still living, which may very well happen. Tell me in all conscience, if signing such a contract isn't equivalent to throwing one's self, bound hand and foot, into the Gironde? You want to make your daughter happy? If she loves her husband, a sentiment which notaries never doubt, she will marry his disappointment. Madame, I see enough in it to kill her with grief, for she will be poor. Yes, madame, a beggarly twenty thousand a year is poverty to people who need a hundred thousand. If Monsieur le Comte should

spend money foolishly through love, his wife would ruin him by her demands whenever any misfortune overtook them. I am pleading for you, for them, for their children, for everybody."

"The old fellow has fired off all his guns," thought Master Solonet, glancing at his client as if to say: "Now is the time!"

"There is one way of reconciling these conflicting interests," said Madame Evangélista, calmly. "I can reserve for myself simply an allowance of sufficient amount to support me in a convent, and then you will have my property at once. I can renounce the world, if by anticipating my death I can assure my daughter's happiness."

"Madame," said the old notary, "let us take time to consider fully what course will remove all obstacles."

"Mon Dieu, monsieur," said Madame Evangélista, who looked upon postponement as fatal to her plans, "everything has been considered. I had no idea what a French marriage was, being a Spaniard and a Creole. I didn't know that before marrying my daughter, I must find out how many years more on earth God would grant me, that my daughter would be injured by my continuing to live, that I did wrong to live, wrong to have ever lived. When my husband married me, I had only my name and myself. My name alone was in his eyes a treasure beside which his own wealth was as nothing. What fortune is equal to a great name? My dowry was beauty, virtue, happiness, noble birth, education. Does money give such treasures? If Natalie's father

could overhear our conversation, his generous heart would be wounded forever and it would spoil his happiness in Paradise. I spent—foolishly perhaps!—some millions, and he never raised an eyebrow. Since his death, I have become economical and sedate in comparison with the life he wanted me to lead. Let us break it off! Monsieur de Manerville is so depressed that I—”

No onomatopœia could convey an idea of the confusion and disorder which the words *Let us break it off* introduced into the conversation; it will suffice to say that all four of these well-bred people were talking at once.

“People marry in Spain in the Spanish fashion and as they choose; but in France they marry in the French fashion, rationally and as they can!” said Mathias.

“Ah! madame,” cried Paul, emerging from his stupor, “you mistake my feelings.”

“It isn’t a question of feelings,” said the old notary, trying to stop his client, “we are doing business for three generations. Are we the ones who have made away with the absent millions, we, who ask nothing but to find a way out of difficulties of which we are innocent?”

“Marry us and don’t haggle,” said Solonet.

“Haggle! haggle! You call defending the interests of children and their father and mother haggling!” said Mathias.

“Yes,” Paul continued, still addressing his mother-in-law, “I deplore my youthful extravagance,

which has made it impossible for me to put an end to this discussion by a word, as much as you deplore your ignorance of business and your involuntary mismanagement. God knows that I am not at this moment thinking of myself; the thought of a quiet life at Lanstrac has no terrors for me; but must not mademoiselle renounce her tastes and her habits? That is the meaning of our life as modified."

"Where did Evangélista get his millions, pray?" said the widow.

"Monsieur Evangélista was a man of business, he played the great game of commercial enterprises, he sent ships to foreign countries and made large sums of money; my client is a landholder whose capital is invested, whose income is fixed," replied the old notary quickly.

"There is still a means of reconciling everything," said Solonet, uttering this remark in a high falsetto tone which imposed silence upon the other three by attracting their eyes and their attention to himself.

The young man resembled a skilful coachman who holds the reins over a four-horse team and amuses himself by exciting and restraining them. He alternately stirred up the evil passions and allayed them, making Paul, whose life and happiness were all the time at stake, sweat in the harness, as well as his own client, who could not follow the discussion in all its windings.

"Madame Evangélista," he said after a pause, "can turn over her five per cent governments and sell her house to-day. I will arrange it so that it

will bring three hundred thousand francs by cutting the land up into house lots. Out of that, she will hand you a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Thus madame will give you nine hundred and fifty thousand francs cash in hand. That may not be all she owes her daughter, but let's see you find many such dowries in France!"

"Very good," said Master Mathias; "but what will become of madame?"

At that question, which implied an acceptance of his suggestion, Solonet said to himself:

"Aha! my old wolf, I've caught you!"

"Madame?" he replied aloud. "Madame will keep the hundred and fifty thousand francs remaining from the price of her house. That sum, added to the proceeds of the sale of her furniture, can be invested in an annuity and will bring her in twenty thousand a year. Monsieur le Comte will arrange to have her make her home with him. Lanstrac is large enough. You have a house in Paris," he said, addressing Paul directly, "so that madame your mother-in-law can live with you wherever you are. A widow who has twenty thousand a year, and hasn't a house to keep up, is richer than madame was when she enjoyed her whole fortune. Madame Evangélista has no one but her daughter, Monsieur le Comte is also alone, your heirs are remote and there is no clashing of interests to be feared. A mother-in-law and son-in-law under such circumstances always form one family. Madame Evangélista will make up for the present deficit by

paying you a certain part of her annuity of twenty thousand francs as board, which will help you out just so much. We know madame to be too generous, too noble, to imagine that she will consent to be a burden to her children. So you will live together, united and happy, with a hundred thousand francs a year at your disposal,—a sufficient sum, is it not, Monsieur le Comte, to enjoy the pleasant things of life and gratify one's caprices, in any country? And, believe me, young married people often feel the need of a third person in their household. Now, I ask, what third person is so affectionate as a good mother?—”

Paul thought, as he heard Solonet speaking, that he was listening to an angel. He looked at Mathias to see if he did not share his admiration for the young notary's impassioned eloquence, for he did not know that, beneath the feigned passion of their fervent words, notaries, like solicitors, conceal the cold and untiring attention of diplomatists.

“A little paradise!” cried the old man.

Aghast at his client's joy, Mathias went and sat down on an ottoman, with his head resting on one hand, absorbed in what was evidently painful meditation. The ponderous phraseology in which men of business designedly envelop their mischievous schemes, he was perfectly familiar with, and he was not the man to allow himself to be taken in by it. He began stealthily to watch his confrère and Madame Evangélista, who continued their conversation with Paul, and he tried to detect some

manifestations of the plot whose cunningly constructed framework was beginning to be visible.

"Monsieur," said Paul to Solonet, "I thank you for the pains you take to reconcile our interests. This compromise solves the whole difficulty more satisfactorily than I hoped;—that is, madame, if it is agreeable to you," he added, turning to Madame Evangélista, "for I will listen to nothing which would not meet your views as well as my own."

"For my part," she replied, "whatever will make my children happy will fill my cup of joy. Don't consider me at all."

"That must not be," said Paul eagerly. "If you were not assured an honorable subsistence, Natalie and I would suffer more on that account than you yourself."

"Have no fear on that score, Monsieur le Comte," replied Solonet.

"Aha!" thought Master Mathias, "they want to make him kiss the rod before scourging him."

"Set your mind at rest," continued Solonet, "there is so much speculation going on in Bordeaux just now that annuities can be purchased at very favorable rates. After we have taken from the price of the house and furniture, the fifty thousand crowns we shall owe you, I think I can promise madame that she will have two hundred and fifty thousand francs remaining. I undertake to invest that sum in a first mortgage on property worth a million, and to obtain ten per cent interest for her life—twenty-five thousand francs a year. In that way we marry

with fortunes of almost the same amount. Indeed, as against your forty-six thousand francs a year, Mademoiselle Natalie brings forty thousand in five per cents, and a hundred and fifty thousand francs in crowns, which can be made to yield seven thousand a year: total, forty-seven thousand."

"That is very clear," said Paul.

As he finished his harangue, Master Solonet cast an oblique glance at his client, which Mathias caught, and which meant: "Bring up your reserves!"

"Why," cried Madame Evangélista, with a joyful outburst which did not seem feigned, "I can give Natalie my diamonds, they must be worth at least a hundred thousand francs."

"We can have them appraised," said the notary, "and that changes the condition of affairs altogether. There's no reason in that case why Monsieur le Comte should not acknowledge the receipt of the full amount due Mademoiselle Natalie from her father's estate, or why the husband and wife both should not assent in the contract to the guardian's accounting. If madame, by despoiling herself with true Spanish loyalty, meets her obligations within a hundred thousand francs, it is no more than fair to give her a receipt in full."

"Nothing could be fairer," said Paul; "I am simply overwhelmed by such generous conduct."

"Is not my daughter another myself?" said Madame Evangélista.

Master Mathias detected a joyful expression upon Madame Evangélista's face when she saw that the

difficulties were almost entirely swept away: her joy and the previous neglect of the diamonds, which came on the fields like fresh troops, confirmed all his suspicions.

“The scene was arranged between them, as gamblers prepare the cards for a game in which they propose to ruin a pigeon,” said the old notary to himself. “Is that poor child whom I saw born, to be plucked alive by his mother-in-law, roasted by love, and eaten by his wife? Must I, who have looked after these fine estates so carefully, look on and see them thrown away in a single evening? Three millions and a half to be put in pledge for a dowry of eleven hundred thousand francs which those two women will make him run through—”

When he thus discovered in Madame Evangélista’s mind intentions which, although they did not point to villainy, crime, theft, fraud, swindling, nor to any wicked or blameworthy purpose, yet contained them all in germ, Master Mathias experienced neither sorrow nor generous indignation. He was not the Misanthrope, he was an old notary, familiar by virtue of his profession with the shrewd scheming of worldly people, with the adroit treachery far worse in its results than a downright murder committed on the highway by a poor devil, who is guillotined therefor in solemn state. To the higher classes of society these episodes in their lives, these diplomatic congresses, are like little out-of-the-way corners where everyone throws his filth. Filled with

compassion for his client, Master Mathias cast his eyes far into the future and could see no signs of promise there.

“Let’s take the field with the same weapons then,” he said to himself, “and whip them.”

*

At that moment, Paul, Solonet and Madame Evangélista, all of whom were made uncomfortable by the old man's silence, realizing how essential that censor's approbation was to sanction the compromise, looked at him at the same moment.

"Well, my dear Monsieur Mathias, what do you think about this?" said Paul.

"This is what I think," replied the intractable and conscientious notary. "You are not rich enough to commit these regal follies. The Lanstrac estate, estimated on a three per cent basis, represents more than a million, including its furniture; the farms of Grassol and Guadet, and your vineyard of Bellerose are worth another million; your two houses and their furniture a third million. Against those three millions, yielding forty-seven thousand two hundred francs a year, Mademoiselle Natalie brings eight hundred thousand francs in government securities, and let us say a hundred thousand francs in diamonds which seem to me of doubtful value! in addition a hundred and fifty thousand in cash, in all a million and fifty thousand francs! In the face of these facts, my confrère boastfully informs you that we marry with equal fortunes! He would have us still accountable for a hundred thousand francs to our children, for, by assenting to the account of the guardianship, we acknowledge to have received from

our wife a contribution of eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, having actually received only a million and fifty thousand! You listen to such stuff with the rapture of a lover, and you believe that Master Mathias, who is not a lover, can forget his arithmetic, and will not point out the difference between landed estates which represent an enormous, constantly increasing capital, and the income of such a dowry, the principal of which is subject to all sorts of chances and to indefinite shrinkage. I am old enough to have seen securities shrink and lands increase in value. You summoned me, Monsieur le Comte, to look after your interests; either let me defend them, or dismiss me."

"If monsieur is in search of a fortune equal to his own," said Solonet, "why, we haven't three millions and a half; nothing can be plainer than that. If you possess three crushing millions, we can offer only our little paltry million—almost nothing at all!—three times the dowry of an archduchess of the house of Austria. Bonaparte received two hundred and fifty thousand francs when he married Marie-Louise."

"Marie-Louise ruined Bonaparte," grumbled Master Mathias.

Natalie's mother realized the meaning of that phrase.

"If my sacrifices are of no use," she cried, "I don't propose to carry on a discussion like this any longer; I rely upon monsieur's discretion and renounce the honor of his hand for my daughter."

In accordance with the plan of operations prescribed by the young notary, this battle of conflicting interests had now reached the point where the victory was to be won by Madame Evangélista. The mother-in-law had opened her heart, turned over her property, was set free, as it were. Under penalty of disregarding the laws of generosity, of belying his protestations of love, the future bridegroom must accept the conditions determined on beforehand by Master Solonet and Madame Evangélista. Like the hand of a clock, impelled by its mechanism, Paul came punctually to the mark.

"What, madame," he cried, "you could, in a moment, break—?"

"But, monsieur," she replied, "to whom is my duty? To my daughter. When she is twenty-one she will accept my accounts and give me a full release. She will have a million, and can, if she will, choose among the sons of all the peers of France. Isn't she the daughter of a Casa-Réal?"

"Madame is right. Why should she be treated worse to-day than she will be fourteen months hence? Don't deprive her of the advantages of her motherhood," said Solonet.

"Mathias," cried Paul with profound sorrow, "there are two kinds of ruin, and you are ruining me at this moment."

He stepped toward him, doubtless to tell him that he wished the contract drawn up on the spot. The old notary warded off that disaster by a look which seemed to say: "Wait!" Then he saw tears in

Paul's eyes, tears extorted by the shame this discussion caused him and by Madame Evangélista's peremptory threat of a rupture, and he dried them by a gesture, the gesture of Archimedes crying: *Eureka!* The words PEER OF FRANCE were, to him, like a torch in a subterranean vault.

Natalie appeared at that moment enchanting as the dawn, and said with a childlike air:

"Am I in the way?"

"Very much in the way, my child!" her mother replied, with cruel bitterness.

"Come, my dear Natalie," said Paul, taking her hand and leading her to an easy-chair near the fireplace, "everything is arranged!" For it was impossible for him to endure the overthrow of his hopes.

Mathias added hastily:

"Yes, everything may yet be arranged."

Like the general who, in a single moment, foils the combinations devised by the enemy, the old notary had seen the genius who presides over the notarial profession unrolling before him in legal characters an idea that might save Paul's future and that of his children. Master Solonet imagined no other ending to these irreconcilable difficulties than the resolution inspired in the young man's heart by love, and which this tempest of emotions and selfish interests had led him to declare; for that reason he was greatly surprised by his confrère's exclamation.

Curious to know what remedy Master Mathias could have in mind for a state of affairs which might

well seem to him to be hopeless beyond redemption, he said:

"What do you suggest?"

"Natalie, my dear child, leave us," said Madame Evangélista.

"Mademoiselle is not in the way," replied Master Mathias, smiling; "I am going to speak in her interest as well as in Monsieur le Comte's."

Profound silence ensued, while all present, trembling with excitement, awaited the old man's deliverance with indescribable interest.

"To-day," Master Mathias resumed after a pause, "the notary's profession wears a changed aspect. To-day, political revolutions have an influence upon the future of families, which was not the case formerly. Formerly, lives ran on definite lines and the respective ranks of different people were fixed—"

"We aren't here to take a course in political economy, but to draw a contract of marriage," said Solonet, interrupting the old man with an impatient gesture.

"I beg you to let me have my turn," said the old fellow.

Solonet sat down on the ottoman, saying to Madame Evangélista in an undertone:

"You'll find out now what we call among ourselves *galimatias*."

"Notaries are obliged therefore to follow the course of political affairs, which are closely connected nowadays with the affairs of private individuals. Here's an example. Formerly the noble

families had fortunes that could not be impaired, which the laws of the Revolution shattered, and which the present system has a tendency to reconstruct," continued the old notary, reverting to the rhetorical style of the *tabellionaris boa constrictor*—the *boa-notary*. "By his name, his talents and his fortune, Monsieur le Comte will be summoned some day to sit in the elective Chamber. Perhaps his destiny will lead him to the hereditary Chamber, and we know that he has sufficient means to justify our previsions.—Do you not share my opinion, madame?" he asked the widow.

"You have anticipated my dearest hope," she replied. "Manerville will be a peer of France, or I shall die of disappointment."

"And whatever will help us on toward that end—?" said Master Mathias, questioning the astute mother-in-law with a friendly gesture.

"Is my most heartfelt wish," she replied.

"Very good," rejoined Mathias, "isn't this marriage a natural opportunity to found a *majorat*? a thing that will certainly incline the government to look favorably upon my client's promotion, when a batch of new peers is to be created. Monsieur le Comte will necessarily devote to that purpose the Lanstrac property, which is worth a million. I do not ask mademoiselle to contribute an equal amount toward this foundation, for it wouldn't be fair, but we can apply to it eight hundred thousand francs of her contribution to the common stock. I know of two pieces of property for sale at this moment which

adjoin the Lanstrac estate, and in which the eight hundred thousand francs to be employed in acquiring landed property can be invested some day at four and a half per cent. The house at Paris should also be included in the *majorat*. The balance of the two fortunes, wisely administered, will afford ample provision for the younger children. If the contracting parties agree to these arrangements, Monsieur de Manerville may accept your account of your guardianship and remain liable for the balance. I consent!"

"*Questa coda non è di questo gatto!*"—that tail doesn't belong to that cat—cried Madame Evangelista, glancing at her accomplice Solonet and pointing to Mathias.

"*Il y a quelque anguille sous roche,*"—there's a snake in the grass—said Solonet in an undertone, replying to her Italian proverb with a French one.

"Why all this fuss?" Paul asked Mathias, leading him into the small salon.

"To prevent your ruin," replied the old notary, in a low voice. "You persist in marrying a daughter and a mother who have run through about two millions in seven years, you incur an indebtedness of more than a hundred thousand francs to your children, to whom you must account some day for the eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs belonging to their mother, although you receive to-day barely a million. You run the risk of seeing your fortune consumed in five years, and of being left naked as John the Baptist, and still owing enormous

sums to your wife or her heirs. If you choose to embark on that galley, go ahead, Monsieur le Comte; but at least allow your old friend to save the house of Manerville."

"How do you save it in this way?" asked Paul.

"Listen, Monsieur le Comte; you are in love?"

"Yes."

"A lover is almost as discreet as a cannon-shot, so I won't say anything more. If you should speak, perhaps your marriage would be broken off. I place your love under the protection of my silence. Have you confidence in my devotion?"

"What a question!"

"Well then, let me tell you that Madame Evangelista, her notary and her daughter have been making fools of us right and left, and are more than adroit. *Tudieu!* what a close game!"

"Natalie?" cried Paul.

"I wouldn't put my hand in the fire for her," said the old man. "You want her, take her! But I wanted to see this marriage broken off without the slightest fault on your part."

"Why so?"

"That girl would spend the riches of Peru. Then she rides a horse like a circus-rider, so she's emancipated, as it were: that sort of a girl makes a bad wife."

Paul pressed Master Mathias's hand, and assumed a self-satisfied air.

"Don't be alarmed about that!" said he. "But what ought I to do for the moment?"

"Hold firm to these terms; they'll consent to them, for they injure nobody. Besides, Madame Evangélista cares for nothing but marrying her daughter, I saw through her game; you keep an eye on her."

Paul returned to the salon, where he saw his mother-in-law talking in a low tone with Solonet, as he had been talking with Mathias. Natalie, shut out from both these mysterious conferences, was toying with her hand-screen.

"What a strange thing it is that they say nothing to me about my own affairs!" she was saying to herself, finding the time hang heavy on her hands.

The young notary grasped at a glance the future effect of a stipulation based upon the self-esteem of the parties, and into which his client had plunged head foremost. But, if Mathias was nothing more than a notary, Solonet was still a man of the world to some extent, and carried into his business the self-esteem of a youth. It often happens that personal vanity leads a young man to forget his client's interests. At this juncture, Master Solonet, who did not choose to let the widow think that Nestor was getting the better of Achilles, advised her to adjust the matter promptly upon these terms. The future execution of the contract mattered little to him; so far as he was concerned, the conditions of victory were that Madame Evangélista should be set free, her subsistence assured, and Natalie married.

"Bordeaux will know that you give Natalie about eleven hundred thousand francs, and that you have

twenty-five thousand a year left for yourself," Solonet whispered in Madame Evangélista's ear. "I didn't expect to obtain such an excellent result."

"But," said she, "pray explain to me why the creation of this *majorat* calms the storm so quickly?"

"Distrust of you and your daughter. Such an estate is inalienable: neither of them can touch it."

"That is positively insulting."

"No. We call it foresight. The good old man has caught you in a trap. Refuse to establish the *majorat* and he will say to us: 'So you want to run through my client's fortune, which, by the creation of the *majorat*, is put out of harm's way, as if they were married under the dotal régime?' "

Solonet quieted his own scruples, by saying to himself:

"These stipulations won't take effect for a long while to come, and then Madame Evangélista will be dead and buried."

For the moment, Madame Evangélista was satisfied with Solonet's explanations, for she had every confidence in him. Moreover, she knew nothing about the laws; she saw her daughter's speedy marriage assured and she asked nothing more, the sly one; she was filled with joy at her success. Thus, as Mathias anticipated, neither Solonet nor Madame Evangélista understood the full scope of his plan, supported as it was by unassailable arguments.

"Well, Monsieur Mathias," said the widow, "everything is for the best."

"Madame, if you and Monsieur le Comte agree to these conditions, you must exchange your words of honor.—It is understood, is it not," he continued, looking from one to the other, "that the marriage will take place on condition that a *majorat* be created, composed of the estate of Lanstrac and the house on Rue de la Pépinière, belonging to the groom, and of eight hundred thousand francs in money included in the contribution of the bride, to be invested in real estate? Pardon this repetition, madame; a positive and solemn engagement is essential. The creation of a *majorat* demands formalities, steps to be taken at the Chancellor's office and a royal ordinance, and we ought to proceed at once to purchase what property is to be purchased in order to include it in the enumeration of the estates which the royal ordinance has the effect of rendering inalienable. In many families they would make a compromise, but between you a simple agreement ought to suffice. Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Madame Evangélista.

"Yes," said Paul.

"And what about me?" laughed Natalie.

"You are a minor, mademoiselle," replied Solonet; "don't you complain."

It was thereupon agreed that Master Mathias should draw up the contract, that Master Solonet should prepare the guardianship account, and that the two documents should be signed, as the law required, a few days before the wedding. The notaries rose and saluted the hostess.

"It is raining. Mathias, shall I drive you home?" said Solonet. "My cabriolet is here."

"My carriage is at your service," said Paul, manifesting a purpose to accompany his notary.

"I don't want to rob you of a single instant," said the old fellow; "I accept my confrère's offer."

"Well," said Achilles to Nestor, as they drove along in the cabriolet, "you were truly patriarchal. It's a fact that those youngsters would have ruined themselves."

"It frightened me to think of their future," said Mathias, keeping his own counsel as to the motives of his proposition.

At that moment, the two notaries resembled two actors shaking hands in the wings after they have been performing upon the stage a scene of hatred and recrimination.

"But," said Solonet, with his mind upon professional matters, "isn't it for me to purchase the estates of which you speak? isn't it to be done with our dowry?"

"How can you say anything about Mademoiselle Evangélista's property in a *majorat* created by the Comte de Manerville?" said Mathias.

"The Chancellor's office will help us out of that difficulty," said Solonet.

"But I am the vendor's notary as well as the purchaser's," replied Mathias. "Besides, Monsieur de Manerville can purchase in her name. When the payment is made, we will mention that it is made with the dotal funds."

"You have an answer to everything, my old friend," said Solonet with a laugh. "You were wonderful to-night, you whipped us soundly."

"For an old fellow who wasn't on the lookout for your broadside of grape and canister, it wasn't bad, eh?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Solonet.

The deplorable struggle, in which the material welfare of a family had been so seriously threatened was in their eyes simply a question of notarial polemics.

"We haven't been in the game forty years for nothing!" said Mathias. "Hark ye, Solonet," he continued, "I am a good sort of fellow, and you may have a hand in arranging the sale of the estates to be added to the *majorat*."

"Thanks, my dear Mathias. At the first opportunity, you will find me at your service."



While the two notaries were thus going their way in peace, with no other emotion than a little dryness of the throat, Paul and Madame Evangélista were suffering from the nervous excitement, the præcordial agitation, the spasmodic movements of marrow and brain, which people of strong passions feel after a scene in which their material interests and their sentiments have been violently shaken up. In Madame Evangélista's case, these last rumblings of the storm were dominated by a terrifying thought, by a lurid glare which she wished to have explained.

"Has not Master Mathias destroyed in a few minutes the labors of six months?" she said to herself. "Has he not removed Paul from my influence by sowing evil suspicions in his mind during their private conference in the small salon?"

She was standing in front of the fireplace, lost in thought, with her elbow resting on the corner of the marble mantel. When the porte-cochère closed behind the notaries' carriage, she turned toward her son-in-law, impatient to verify her suspicions.

"This has been the most terrible day of my whole life!" cried Paul, genuinely overjoyed to see all obstacles removed, "I know nobody so rough in his manners as old Père Mathias. May God hear him and may I become a peer of France! Dear

Natalie, I long for it now, more for you than for myself. You are all my ambition, I live only in you."

When she heard these words emphasized by the heart, and especially when she saw Paul's clear blue eyes, and his cloudless brow, which betrayed no mental reservation, Madame Evangélista's joy was complete. She reproached herself for the somewhat sharp words with which she had spurred on her son-in-law; and in the intoxication of success, she resolved to clear up the future. She resumed her tranquil expression, imparted to her eyes the affectionate sweetness that made her so fascinating, and answered Paul thus:

"I can say as much to you. Perhaps, my dear child, my Spanish disposition carried me farther than my heart would have had me go. Be what you are, as good as God himself! Bear me no malice for a few inconsiderate words. Give me your hand—"

Paul was confused and blamed himself in a thousand directions; he kissed Madame Evangélista.

"Dear Paul," said she, deeply moved, "why didn't those two sharks arrange the matter without us, as it was all so easy to arrange?"

"Then I shouldn't have known how noble you are, and generous," said Paul.

"She is all of that, Paul!" said Natalie, pressing his hand.

"We have several little matters to arrange, my dear child," said Madame Evangélista. "My daughter and I are above the nonsense that many

people make so much of. For instance, Natalie won't need any diamonds, for I give her mine."

"Ah! dear mother, do you think I can accept them?" cried Natalie.

"Yes, my child, they're one of the conditions of the contract."

"I won't have it, I won't be married at all," replied Natalie, eagerly. "Keep the jewels my father took so much pleasure in offering you. How can Monsieur Paul demand—?"

"Hush, my dear girl," said the mother, whose eyes filled with tears. "My ignorance of business demands much more than that."

"What, pray?"

"I am going to sell my house in order to pay what I owe you."

"What can you owe me, who owe my life to you?" said Natalie. "Can I ever pay my debt to you? If my marriage costs you the slightest sacrifice, I won't be married."

"Child!"

"Dear Natalie," said Paul, "pray understand that neither I, nor your mother, nor you, demand these sacrifices, but our children—"

"And suppose I don't marry?" said she, cutting him short.

"Then you don't love me?" said Paul.

"Nonsense, silly girl, do you think that a contract's a card-house that you can blow over at will? My dear little ignoramus, you don't know how much trouble we had building up a *majorat* for your oldest

son! Don't throw us back into the tiresome discussions we've just come out of."

"Why ruin my mother?" said Natalie, looking at Paul.

"Why are you so rich?" he replied, with a smile.

"Don't dispute too bitterly, children, you're not married yet," said Madame Evangélista.—"Paul," she continued, "you won't have to provide any wedding present or jewels or trousseau, will you? Natalie has everything in profusion. Rather keep the money you would have put into wedding presents to make sure of a little permanent comfort in your home. I don't know anything more hopelessly vulgar than to spend a hundred thousand francs on a present of which there'll be nothing left some day but an old box lined with white satin. On the other hand, five thousand francs a year to spend on her toilette save a young woman a vast amount of trouble, and she has them all her life. Besides, the money wedding presents would cost will be necessary for arranging your house in Paris. We will return to Lanstrac in the spring; for Solonet will have settled everything up during the winter."

"Everything is for the best," said Paul, happy beyond measure.

"Then I shall see Paris!" cried Natalie, with an accent at which a De Marsay might justly have been alarmed.

"If we decide upon that plan," said Paul, "I will write to De Marsay to take a box for me for the winter at the Italiens and the Opéra."

"You are very good, I didn't dare to ask you to do that," said Natalie. "Marriage is a very agreeable institution, if it gives husbands the power of divining their wives' wishes."

"That's just it," said Paul. "But it's twelve o'clock, I must go."

"Why so early to-night?" said Madame Evangélista, exerting the talent for cajolery to which men are so susceptible.

Although everything had taken place in the best of temper, in accordance with the requirements of the most exquisite courtesy, the effect of this discussion of pecuniary matters was to sow in the minds of mother-in-law and son-in-law alike, a seed of distrust and hostility, ready to show its head at the first flash of anger, or in the heat produced by the too violent friction of sentiments. In most families, the creation of marriage-portions and the respective contributions to be provided for in the marriage contract, engender embryotic hostilities, aroused by wounded self-esteem, by the lesion of divers sentiments, by regret for enforced sacrifices and the desire to lessen them. Must there not be a victor and a vanquished when a difficulty arises? The relatives of the contracting parties try to conclude the affair advantageously, it being in their eyes a purely commercial one, and a proper occasion to resort to the tricks and wiles and grasping for profits practised in business. In most cases, the husband alone is initiated into the secrets of these discussions, and the young bride is kept, like

Natalie, in ignorance of the stipulations which make her rich or poor. As he took his leave, Paul reflected that, thanks to his notary's skill, his fortune was almost entirely saved from the risk of annihilation. If Madame Evangélista did not live apart from her daughter, the family would have more than a hundred thousand francs a year to spend: thus all his anticipations of a blissful existence were realized.

"My mother-in-law seems to me to be an excellent woman," he said to himself, still under the spell of the blandishments, by which Madame Evangélista had striven to scatter the clouds brought together by the discussion. "Mathias is mistaken. Those notaries are curious fellows, they instil poison into everything. The trouble all came from that little pettifogger Solonet, who wanted to make himself appear clever."

While Paul was on his way to bed, running over in his mind the points he had gained during the evening, Madame Evangélista was likewise taking credit for the victory herself.

"Well, my darling, are you satisfied?" said Natalie, following her mother into her bedroom.

"Yes, my love," replied the mother, "everything has succeeded according to my desires, and I feel as if a weight that was crushing me this morning had been taken from my shoulders. Paul is an excellent sort of man. Dear child! yes, we certainly will make his life an enviable one. You will make him happy and I will look after his political fortunes.

The Spanish ambassador is a friend of mine, I'll renew my friendship with him and with all my acquaintances. Oh! we shall soon be in the swim, and everything will be pleasant and joyful for us. To you the pleasure, dear children; to me, the last serious occupation of life, the game of ambition. Do not be alarmed because I am selling my house; do you suppose we should ever return to Bordeaux? To Lanstrac, if you choose. But we will pass every winter in Paris where our real interests now are. Well, Natalie, was it so very hard to do what I asked you?"

"At times, little mother, I was ashamed."

"Solonet advises me to put the proceeds of my house into an annuity," said Madame Evangélista, "but we must do something else; I don't want to deprive you of one liard of my fortune."

"I saw that you were all very angry," said Natalie. "How was the storm finally allayed?"

"By my offering my diamonds," Madame Evangélista replied. "Solonet was right. How cleverly he handled the business! But," she added, "bring me my jewel-case, Natalie! I have never seriously considered what those diamonds are worth. When I said a hundred thousand francs, I was crazy. Didn't Madame de Gyas declare that the necklace and earrings your father gave me on our wedding-day were worth at least that amount! My poor husband did spend money so freely! And then my family diamond, the one that Philip II. gave the Duke of Alva, and that my aunt bequeathed to me,

the *Discreto* was, I think, once appraised at four thousand double pistoles."

Natalie brought to her mother's dressing-table her pearl necklaces, her gold bracelets, her jewels of all sorts and kinds and piled them up there, manifesting the indescribable feeling which rejoices the hearts of certain women at sight of the treasures with which, according to the commentators of the Talmud, the fallen angels seduce the daughters of men, gathering these flowers of the celestial flame in the bowels of the earth.

"Certainly," said Madame Evangélista, "although so far as jewels are concerned I am good for nothing but to receive and wear them, it does seem to me that these are worth a great deal of money. And then, if we make one family, I can sell my plate, which by weight alone is worth thirty thousand francs. When we brought it from Lima, I remember that the customs officers put that value on it. Solonet is right! I will send for Elie Magus. The Jew will appraise these jewels. Perhaps I shan't have to sink the rest of my fortune in an annuity."

"What a lovely pearl necklace!" said Natalie.

"I hope he will let you keep it, if he loves you. Oughtn't he to have all the jewels I turn over to him reset and give them to you? According to the contract the diamonds belong to you. Well, good-night, my angel. After such a tiresome day, we are both in need of sleep."

The coquette, the Creole, the great lady, incapable of analyzing the provisions of a contract which

MME. EVANGÉLISTA AND NATALIE

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was not yet drawn, went to sleep rejoicing at the thought of her daughter's marriage to a man easily led, who would allow them jointly to rule the household, and whose fortune, united to theirs, would make it unnecessary for them to change their mode of life. After she had settled her accounts with her daughter, whose whole fortune was to be included in the contract as received by the husband, Madame Evangelista would be even more at ease.

"Was I foolish to worry so?" she said to herself; "I wish that the wedding was over."



Thus Madame Evangélista, Paul, Natalie and the two notaries were one and all enchanted with the outcome of this first meeting. The *Te Deum* was sung in both camps—a perilous condition of affairs! for there comes a time when the scales drop from the eyes of the vanquished. To the widow, her son-in-law was the vanquished.

The next morning Elie Magus called upon Madame Evangélista, thinking, from the rumors that were in circulation as to the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle Natalie and Comte Paul, that the business in hand was the purchase of jewelry. The Jew was amazed therefore to learn that, on the contrary, his presence was desired in connection with a quasi-judicial seizure of the mother-in-law's diamonds. The Jew instinct, assisted by certain insidious questions, convinced him that the property was to be taken into account in the marriage contract. The diamonds not being for sale, he appraised them as if they were to be purchased by a private individual at a dealer's. Jewelers alone possess the art of distinguishing the diamonds of Asia from those of Brazil. The stones from Golconda and Visapour are distinguished by their whiteness and by the pure lustre not to be found in the others whose water has a noticeable yellow tinge which makes them, if of equal weight, of less value

in the market. Madame Evangélista's necklace and earrings, composed entirely of Asiatic diamonds, were valued by Elie Magus at two hundred and fifty thousand francs. As for the *Discreto*, that was, he said, one of the finest diamonds owned by private individuals; it was well known in the trade and was worth a hundred thousand francs. When she heard this price, which revealed so fully her husband's extravagance, Madame Evangélista asked if she could have that amount immediately.

"Madame," the Jew replied, "if you wished to sell, I would give only seventy-five thousand for the single stone and a hundred and sixty thousand for the necklace and eardrops."

"Why such a discount?" demanded Madame Evangélista in amazement.

"Madame," the Jew replied, "the handsomer diamonds are, the longer we keep them. The fact that opportunities to place them are so rare is due to the high price of the stones. As the dealer cannot afford to lose the interest on his money, why the interest to be recouped, added to the chances of a rise or fall in value to which merchandise of this sort is exposed, accounts for the difference between the purchasing and selling price. You have lost the interest on three hundred thousand francs for twenty years. If you wore your diamonds ten times a year, they would cost you a thousand crowns every time. How many handsome dresses one can buy for a thousand crowns! The people who keep diamonds are fools; but, luckily

for us, women don't care to understand these matters."

"I thank you for having explained them to me, and I'll profit by it."

"Do you wish to sell?" continued the Jew eagerly.

"What are the others worth?" said Madame Evangélista.

The Jew scrutinized the gold of the settings, held the pearls up to the light, examined the rubies, the tiaras, the clasps, the bracelets, the buckles and chains, with great care and mumbled:

"There are quantities of Portuguese diamonds from Brazil! The whole lot isn't worth more than a hundred thousand francs to me. But between dealer and customer," he added, "these jewels would sell for more than fifty thousand crowns."

"We will keep them," said Madame Evangélista.

"You make a mistake," replied Elie Magus. "With the income of the money they represent, you could have just as handsome diamonds five years hence, and you would have the capital besides."

This singular interview was soon noised abroad and confirmed certain rumors set afloat by the discussion over the contract. In the provinces everything is known. The servants, having heard some loud words, imagined a discussion much more lively than it really was; their gossip with other servants gradually spread, and ascended from the lower regions to the ears of the masters. The attention of society and of the city at large was so

concentrated upon the marriage of two persons equally wealthy; everyone, small or great, was so engrossed by the subject, that, within a week, the strangest reports were current in Bordeaux:—Madame Evangélista was selling her fine house, therefore she must be ruined. She had offered her diamonds to Elie Magus. Nothing was settled between her and the Comte de Manerville. Would the marriage come off? Some said *yes*, others *no*. The two notaries, when questioned, gave the lie to these calumnious statements, and spoke of difficulties purely technical growing out of the creation of a *majorat*. But when public opinion has taken a start down an incline, it is a difficult matter to turn it back. Although Paul went every day to Madame Evangélista's, and in the face of the assertions of the two notaries, the plausible calumnies continued to circulate. Several young women, their mothers or their aunts, disgusted at a marriage of which they themselves or their families for them had dreamed, no more forgave Madame Evangélista her good fortune, than an author forgives his neighbor's success. Some persons revenged themselves for the twenty years of luxury and splendor with which the Spanish family had crushed their self-esteem. A great man at the prefecture remarked that the two notaries and the two families could not say anything different or behave differently if there had been a rupture. The time required for the creation of the *majorat* confirmed the suspicions of the Bordeaux politicians.

"They'll dilly-dally the whole winter; then in the spring they'll go to the waters, and a year hence we shall hear that the match is broken off."

"You understand," said some, "that, in order to save the honor of the two families, they'll say that the difficulties weren't suggested by either party; it will be the chancellor's office that will refuse, the rupture will be caused by some quibble over the *majorat*."

"Madame Evangélista," said others, "has been living at a rate that would exhaust the mines of Valenciana. When the time came to bring matters to a point they wouldn't find anything there!"

An excellent opportunity for everyone to compute the lovely widow's expenditure, in order to prove her ruin categorically! The rumors were so persistent that bets were made for or against the marriage. In accordance with the jurisprudence of society this gossip went the circuit of the city without coming to the knowledge of the interested parties. No one was sufficiently hostile or sufficiently friendly to Paul or to Madame Evangélista to inform them of it. Paul had some business at Lanstrac and availed himself of the opportunity to invite a party of young men from the city there to hunt—a sort of farewell to his bachelor life. This hunting-party was hailed by society as a convincing confirmation of the public suspicions. At this juncture, Madame de Gyas, who had an unmarried daughter, thought it advisable to feel the ground and to go and exult sadly over the check received by the Evangélistas.

Natalie and her mother were much surprised when they saw the marchioness's face, badly made up for the occasion, and asked her if anything had gone wrong with her.

"Why," said she, "don't you know of the reports that are in circulation in Bordeaux? Although I believe them to be false, I came to find out the truth in order to put an end to them, in my own circle of friends, at least, if not everywhere. To be the dupes or the accomplices of such a mistake is too false a position for friends to care to remain in it."

"Why, what is going on, for heaven's sake?" exclaimed the mother and daughter.

Madame de Gyas gave herself the pleasure of relating what everyone said, without sparing her two intimate friends a single blow of the dagger. Natalie and Madame Evangélista laughed as their eyes met, but they thoroughly understood the meaning of the narrative and the motives of their friend. Madame Evangélista took her revenge in much the same way that Celimenes was revenged upon Arsinoë.

"My dear, can it be that you, who know the province so well, don't know what a mother is capable of when she has a daughter on her hands, a daughter who doesn't marry for lack of dowry, for lack of a lover or beauty or wit, sometimes for lack of everything? She would stop a diligence, she would do murder, she would wait for a man at a street corner, she would give herself away a hundred times if she were worth anything. There are many in that plight in Bordeaux, who doubtless attribute

their own thoughts and actions to us. Naturalists have described for us the manners of many ferocious beasts, but they have forgotten the mother and daughter in quest of a husband. They are hyenas, who, to borrow the words of the Psalmist, go about seeking whom they may devour, and who combine man's intelligence and woman's ingenuity with the natural temperament of the beast. I can well imagine that those Bordeaux spiders, Mademoiselle de Belor, Mademoiselle de Trans, etc., who have been so long at work weaving their webs without catching a single fly in them, without hearing the slightest buzzing of wings in the neighborhood, are furious, and I forgive them for their venomous remarks. But that you, who can find a husband for your daughter when you choose, you who are rich and titled, who have no touch of provincialism, whose daughter is clever, accomplished, pretty and in a position to choose where she will; that you, who stand so apart from the others by reason of your Parisian charm of manner, should have felt the least anxiety, is a matter of wonder to us! Do I owe the public a statement of the matrimonial stipulations which our men of business have thought advisable, in view of the political conditions that govern my son-in-law's existence? Is the craze for public discussion to extend to private family affairs? Must we convoke by sealed letters the fathers and mothers of *your* province to be present at the settlement of the provisions of our marriage contract?"

A torrent of epigrams poured down upon Bordeaux.

Madame Evangélista was about to leave the city, she could pass in review her friends and enemies, caricature them, scourge them at her will and have nothing to fear. So she gave utterance to the observations she had kept back, took the revenge she had postponed, seeking to ascertain what interest this or that person could have to deny the sun at high noon.

"But, my dear," said the Marquise de Gyas, "Monsieur de Manerville's visit to Lanstrac, his entertaining young men under such circumstances—"

"Ah! my dear," the great lady interrupted her, "do you suppose that we adopt the trivial bourgeois formalities? Is Comte Paul to be held in leash like a man who may run away? Do you fancy we need to have the gendarmes to keep him? Are we afraid of seeing him snatched away from us by some Bordeaux conspiracy?"

"Be assured, my dear friend, that you give me very great pleasure—"

The marchioness was interrupted by a footman, who announced Paul. Like all lovers, Paul thought it was delightful to ride four leagues in order to pass an hour with Natalie. He had left his friends hunting and entered the room booted and spurred, with his hunting-crop in his hand.

"Dear Paul," said Natalie, "you don't know how effectively you answer madame at this moment."

When Paul learned of the calumnies that were rife in Bordeaux, he began to laugh instead of losing his temper.

“Those good people know perhaps that there’ll be none of the feasting and merry-making customary in the provinces, and no marriage in the cathedral at high noon, and they’re wild with rage.—Well, dear mother,” he said, kissing Madame Evangélista’s hand, “we’ll throw a ball at their heads the day the contract is signed, as they throw the populace their fête on the great square in the Champs-Élysées, and we will afford our excellent friends the melancholy pleasure of signing such a contract as is seldom made in the provinces.”

This episode was of great importance. Madame Evangélista invited all Bordeaux to be present on the day the contract was to be signed, and manifested a purpose of making her last entertainment a magnificent affair that would afford a palpable contradiction to the absurd falsehoods invented by society. It was a solemn pledge, given in presence of the public, that Paul and Natalie should marry. The preparations for this function lasted forty days; it was called the night of the camellias. There was an enormous quantity of those flowers on the stairway, in the reception-room, and in the room where supper was served. This delay naturally coincided with that necessitated by the formalities preliminary to the marriage, and by the steps taken at Paris toward creating the *majorat*. The estates adjoining Lanstrac were purchased, the banns were published, all doubt was swept away. Friends and foes had ceased to think of aught save making ready their costumes for the appointed day. The time

occupied by these occurrences had a softening effect upon the difficulties to which the first conference gave rise, consigning to oblivion the wordy disputes of the stormy discussion apropos of the preparation of the marriage contract. Neither Paul nor his mother-in-law gave another thought to the matter. Was it not, as Madame Evangélista had said, the affair of the two notaries? But who has not had the experience, when life is moving on so quickly, of being suddenly hailed by the voice of memory, which starts up often too late, and reminds you of an important fact, an imminent danger? On the morning of the day when the contract of Paul and Natalie was to be signed, such an *ignis fatuus* of the mind appeared to Madame Evangélista as she lay half-asleep. The sentence:—*Questa coda non è di questo gatto!*—she had uttered when Mathias acceded to Solonet's conditions, was shouted in her ear by a voice. Notwithstanding her ignorance of affairs, Madame Evangélista said to herself: "If cunning Master Mathias was satisfied, it must certainly have been at the expense of one or the other of the two parties." The interests threatened could not be Paul's as she had hoped. Could it be that her daughter's fortune was to pay the costs of the war? She determined to demand enlightenment as to the meaning of the contract, without reflecting upon what she was to do in the event that her interests should be too seriously endangered.

This day had so great an influence upon Paul's

married life that it is necessary to explain some of those external circumstances which have an effect upon all minds. As the *Evangelista* mansion was to be sold, the Comte de Manerville's mother-in-law hesitated at no outlay for the occasion. The courtyard was sanded, covered with a Turkish tent and embellished with shrubs, although it was mid-winter. The camellias, whose fame was heralded from Angoulême to Dax, covered the staircases and vestibules. Sections of wall had disappeared to increase the size of the banqueting-room and the ball-room. Bordeaux, where so many fortunes amassed in the colonies are gathered together, was in a fever of anticipation of the promised scenes from fairyland. About eight o'clock, when the last discussion was in progress, people, curious to see the richly dressed ladies alighting from their carriages, stood in long lines on each side of the *porte-cochère*. Thus the sumptuous atmosphere of a *fête* operated upon the minds of the actors at the moment of signing the contract. When the crisis came, the lamps were flaming upon their pedestals, and the rumbling of the first carriages was heard in the courtyard. The two notaries dined with the fiancés and the mother-in-law. Mathias's chief clerk, who was to secure signatures during the evening, taking care that the contract should not be read by any inquisitive guest, was also invited to dinner.

He who will may search his memory: he would find there no toilette, no woman, nothing comparable to Natalie's beauty; arrayed in satin and lace,

with her hair falling coquettishly in endless curls upon her neck, she resembled a flower enveloped in its foliage. Dressed in a robe of cherry velvet, a color skilfully chosen to heighten the effect of her complexion, her black eyes and hair, Madame Evangelista, in all the beauty of her forty years, wore her pearl necklace, clasped by the *Discreto*, to silence calumny.

*

To understand the ensuing scene, it is necessary to say that Paul and Natalie sat together at the corner of the fireplace, and did not listen to one article in the guardianship account. Children both, equally happy, one in his desires, the other in her wondering anticipation, seeing their life a cloudless sky before them, rich, young, and in love, they did not for an instant cease talking in undertones in each other's ears. Emboldened by the approaching legalization of his love, Paul amused himself by kissing the ends of Natalie's fingers, breathing upon her snowy neck, playing with her hair, while hiding from every eye the delights of this illegal emancipation. Natalie was toying with her hand-screen of Indian feathers which Paul had given her—a gift which, according to the superstitious beliefs of some countries, is as ominous a presage for love, as the gift of scissors or any other sharp instrument, which are looked upon without doubt as reminders of the *Parcæ* of mythology.

Madame Evangélista, seated beside the two notaries, paid the most careful attention to the reading of the documents. Having listened to the account of her guardianship, which had been scientifically drawn up by Solonet, and reduced Natalie's share of the three million and some hundred thousand francs left by Monsieur Evangélista, to the famous eleven

hundred and fifty-six thousand, she said to the young couple:

"Come, listen, children, this is your contract!"

The clerk drank a glass of *eau sucrée*, Solonet and Mathias blew their noses. Paul and Natalie glanced at the four, listened to the preamble and resumed their conversation. The statement of the respective contributions; the provisions by which the survivor was to inherit the whole in case there were no children, and the one-fourth outright and life interest in another fourth permitted by the Code, whatever the number of children; the statement of the property to be held in common; the gift of the diamonds to the wife and the books and horses to the husband—all passed off without remark. Then came the creation of the *majorat*. When every part had been read and there was nothing more to be done but to sign, Madame Evangelista inquired what the effect of this *majorat* would be.

"The *majorat*, madame," said Master Solonet, "is an inalienable fortune, deducted from the husband's and wife's fortunes and set aside for the benefit of the eldest son of the family, in each generation; but it does not deprive him of his share in the general division of the remaining property."

"What will be its effect upon my daughter's interests?" she demanded.

Master Mathias, incapable of disguising the truth, answered her question.

"Madame, the *majorat* being an appanage distinct

from the two fortunes of the husband and wife, if the latter should die first, leaving one or more children, one being a male child, Monsieur le Comte de Manerville will be held to account to them for three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs only, as to which the provision giving him a life-interest in one-fourth and one-fourth outright will apply. Thus his indebtedness to his children is reduced to about one hundred and sixty thousand francs, exclusive of his interest in the common fund, his allowances, etc. In the contrary event, if he should die first, leaving male children, Madame de Manerville would be entitled to three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, in addition to her interest under the contract in the property of Monsieur de Manerville not included in the *majorat*, the diamonds, of which she will resume possession, and her part in the common fund."

Thus the results of Master Mathias's subtle policy were made manifest.

"My daughter is ruined," said Madame Evangelista, in a low voice.

The old notary and the young overheard this remark.

"Is it to be ruined," rejoined Master Mathias in a half-whisper, "to establish an indestructible fortune for one's family?"

When he saw the expression on his client's face, the young notary thought it to be his duty to reduce the catastrophe to figures.

"We tried to cheat them out of three hundred

thousand francs, and they have clearly got the better of us by eight hundred thousand; the contract is balanced by a loss of four hundred thousand francs to us, to the benefit of our children. We must break it off or go on," said Solonet to Madame Evangélista.

The brief silence that ensued cannot be described. Master Mathias with a triumphant air was awaiting the signature of the two persons who had plotted to despoil his client. Natalie, unable to understand that she was losing half of her fortune, and Paul, entirely ignorant that the Manerville family were gaining it, were still laughing and talking together. Solonet and Madame Evangélista exchanged glances, the one refraining from manifesting his indifference, the other repressing a multitude of angry feelings. After she had suffered indescribable pangs of remorse and had come to look upon Paul as the cause of her dishonesty, the widow had determined to resort to disgraceful tactics in order to cast upon him the odium of her shortcomings as guardian, looking upon him as her lawful victim. Suddenly she discovered that where she expected to triumph she was undone, and the victim was her own daughter! Guilty without profit, she found that she had become the dupe of an upright old man, whose esteem she had unquestionably forfeited. Were not Master Mathias's precautions inspired by her underhand conduct? Awful thought! Mathias had enlightened Paul. Even if he had not yet spoken, certainly as soon as the contract was

signed, the old wolf would warn his client of the risks incurred,—now happily averted,—if for no other purpose than to receive the praise to which even the noblest minds are accessible. Would he not put him on his guard against a woman of sufficient guile to have taken a hand in such a shameful conspiracy? would he not put an end to the empire she had gained over her son-in-law? Weak natures, once put on their guard, take refuge in obstinacy and never recover from the shock. So all was lost! On the day when the discussion began, she had reckoned upon Paul's weakness and upon the impossibility of his breaking off a match that had gone so far. But at this time she was herself much more firmly bound. Three months ago there were comparatively few obstacles in the way if Paul chose to break the engagement; but to-day all Bordeaux knew that the two notaries had spent the last two months adjusting the difficulties. The banns were published. The marriage was to be celebrated within two days. The friends of both families, all the first society of Bordeaux, were pouring into the house, arrayed for the fête. How was it possible to say that everything was postponed? The cause of the rupture would soon be known, Master Mathias's unbending probity would compel belief, his story would be listened to in preference to hers. The wags would all be against the *Évangélistas*, who never lacked jealous detractors. And so she must yield! These eminently just reflections fell upon Madame *Évangélista* like a waterspout and her

brain was ready to burst. Although her face retained the serious expression of the diplomatist, her chin trembled with the apoplectic movement by which Catherine II. manifested her wrath on the day when, sitting upon her throne in the presence of her court, and under very similar circumstances, she was defied by the young King of Sweden. Solonet noticed this play of the muscles, announcing a gathering storm of deadly enmity, a threatening storm, unrelieved by lightning-flashes! At that moment Madame Evangélista did, in truth, conceive an insatiable hatred for her son-in-law, hatred of the sort of which the germ was left by the Arabs in the atmosphere of the two Spains.

"Monsieur," said she, putting her lips to her notary's ear, "you called that *galimatias*, but I can't imagine anything more clear."

"Madame, allow me—"

"Monsieur," continued the widow, paying no heed to him, "if you did not realize the effect of these stipulations at the time of our previous conference, it's very extraordinary that it didn't occur to you in the silence of the office. It can't be from lack of capacity."

The young notary led his client into the small salon, saying to himself:

"My fees in the guardianship matter amount to a thousand crowns, I am to have a thousand crowns for the contract and can make six thousand francs on the sale of the house—twelve thousand francs in all to save: I mustn't lose my temper."

He closed the door, looked at Madame Evangélista with the indifferent expression of a man of business, divined the feelings that caused her agitation, and said to her:

"Madame, although I have perhaps overstepped the limits of propriety in your cause, do you intend to repay my devotion with such words?"

"But, monsieur—"

"Madame, I did not estimate the effect of the provisions of the contract, it is true; but if you don't desire Comte Paul for a son-in-law, are you compelled to accept him? Is the contract signed? Give your party and let us postpone the signing. It's better to make fools of all Bordeaux than to make a fool of yourself."

"How can I account satisfactorily for not going through with the affair to all these people who are prejudiced against us now?"

"Say that there was some mistake made in Paris, that some papers haven't arrived," said Solonet.

"But what about the land we've purchased?"

"Monsieur de Manerville won't go begging for dowries or wives."

"No, he will lose nothing; but we lose everything!"

"You can get a count at a better bargain than this," rejoined Solonet, "if the title is your main motive for this marriage."

"No, no, we can't trifle with our honor thus! I am caught in the trap, monsieur. To-morrow it

would be all over Bordeaux. We have exchanged solemn pledges."

"Do you wish Mademoiselle Natalie to be happy?" said Solonet.

"Before everything."

"Doesn't happiness in France consist in being mistress in one's house? She will lead that idiot of a Manerville by the nose; he's such a blockhead that he hasn't noticed anything. Even if he is suspicious of you just now, he will always believe in his wife. Isn't his wife, to all intent, identical with you? Comte Paul's fate is still in your hands."

"If what you say is true, monsieur, I don't know what I could refuse you," said she, in a transport of joy, which changed her whole expression.

"Let us return, madame," said Master Solonet, grasping his client's meaning; "but, above all things, listen carefully to me! You can call me a bungler afterwards, if you choose."

"My dear confrère," said the young notary to Master Mathias as they returned to the large salon, "*notwithstanding your skill*, you did not provide for the contingency of Monsieur de Manerville's decease without children, nor for that of his decease, leaving daughters only. In either of those two cases, the *majorat* would lead to litigation with the Manervilles, for then—

"They will come forward, doubt it not!"

"I think it advisable, therefore, to provide that, in the first case, the *majorat* shall be included in the

general provision that all the property is to go to the wife, and that, in the second case, the creation of the *majorat* shall be annulled. This matter concerns only the expectant bride."

"Such a clause seems to me perfectly fair," said Master Mathias. "As to its ratification, Monsieur le Comte can undoubtedly come to an understanding with the chancellor's office, if need be."

The young notary seized a pen and wrote that ominous clause upon the margin of the contract, Paul and Natalie paying no heed to what was taking place. Madame Evangélista lowered her eyes while Master Mathias read it.

"Let us sign," said the mother.

The volume of voice that Madame Evangélista repressed betrayed violent emotion. She was saying to herself:

"No, my daughter shall not be ruined; but he shall! My daughter shall have the name and title and fortune. If Natalie ever finds out that she doesn't love her husband, if she should some day fall madly in love with another man, Paul shall be driven out of France! and my daughter shall be free, happy and rich."

Although Master Mathias was thoroughly at home in the analysis of pecuniary interests, he had but little skill in the analysis of human passions; he accepted the words: *Let us sign*, as an apology instead of detecting a declaration of war therein. While Solonet and his clerk were watching Natalie sign and affixing seals to all the documents, an

operation that required time, Mathias took Paul aside, and imparted to him the secret of the stipulations he had insisted upon in order to save him from certain ruin.

"You have a mortgage of a hundred and fifty thousand francs on this house," said he in conclusion, "and to-morrow it will be sold. I have at my office the government certificates which I have taken pains to have registered in your wife's name. Everything is all right. But the contract contains a receipt for the sum represented by the diamonds, so ask for them; business is business. Diamonds are high just at present and they may go down. The purchase of the Auzac and Saint-Froult estates makes it proper for you to turn everything into cash so as not to touch your wife's *rentes*. So no false shame, Monsieur le Comte. The first payment is demandable after the formalities are concluded; it is to be two hundred thousand francs; include the diamonds in it. You will have the mortgage on the Evangélista house for the second instalment, and the income of the *majorat* will help to pay the rest. If you have the courage to spend only fifty thousand francs in three years, you will recoup the two hundred thousand francs with which you are now chargeable. If you plant grapes in the hilly portions of Saint-Froult you can increase the income from that estate to twenty-six thousand francs. Your *majorat*, without counting your Paris house, will thus be worth fifty thousand a year some day; it will be one of the finest I know.

In this way you will have made an excellent marriage."

Paul pressed his old friend's hands most affectionately. This gesture did not escape the notice of Madame Evangélista, who was just handing Paul the pen. Her suspicions thereupon became convictions, she believed that Paul and Mathias had had an explanation. Waves of blood, laden with rage and hatred, poured in upon her heart. All was said.

Having assured himself that all the marginal addenda were authenticated, and that the three contracting parties had placed their initials and their flourishes at the foot of the various pages, Master Mathias glanced from Paul to his mother-in-law, and as he saw that his client did not ask for the diamonds, he said:

"I don't suppose there will be any question about delivering the diamonds, now that you all form one family."

"It would be more regular for madame to give them up; Monsieur de Manerville is chargeable with the balance of the guardian's account, and no one knows who will live or who will die," said Master Solonet, thinking that he saw an opportunity to excite the mother-in-law's wrath against the son-in-law.

"Ah! mother," said Paul, "it would be an insult to us all to do that.—*Summum jus, summa injuria*, monsieur," he said to Solonet.

"And I," said Madame Evangélista, who, in her

virulent mood, looked upon Mathias's indirect demand as an insult, "I'll tear up the contract if you don't accept them!"

She flounced out of the room in a fit of sanguinary rage, one of the sort that makes one long for the power to overturn everything and that is increased to frenzy by the lack of that power.

"In heaven's name, Paul, take them," said Natalie in his ear. "Mother is angry; I'll find out why to-night and let you know, and we'll soothe her."

Exulting over this first exhibition of malice, Madame Evangélista retained the earrings and the necklace. She brought the jewels valued by Elie Magus at a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Accustomed as they were to see family diamonds in the course of their business of settling estates, Master Mathias and Solonet, as they examined the contents of the cases, went into ecstasies over their beauty.

"You won't lose anything on the *dot*," said Solonet, thereby causing Paul to blush.

"True," said Mathias, "these jewels will surely pay the first instalment on the price of the estates we have purchased."

"And the cost of drawing the contract," said Solonet.

Hate, like love, feeds on trifles, seizes upon everything. Just as the loved one can do nothing wrong, the hated one can do nothing right. Madame Evangélista attributed to affectation the embarrassment that Paul's perfectly natural modesty caused

him to exhibit, as he was reluctant to take the diamonds and did not know where to put the cases; he would have liked to be able to throw them through the window. Madame Evangélista, observing the quandary he was in, gazed fixedly at him with an expression that seemed to say: "Take them away."

"Dear Natalie," said Paul to his future spouse, "take these jewels and put them away; they are yours, I give them to you."

Natalie placed them in the drawer of a console. At that moment the rumbling of carriages, and the murmurs of conversation in the adjoining salons amongst the guests who had already arrived, compelled Natalie and her mother to appear.

The salons were filled in a moment and the festivities began.

"Take advantage of the honeymoon to sell your diamonds," said the old notary to Paul as he took his leave.



Awaiting the signal for dancing to begin, everyone was discussing the marriage in undertones, and some persons expressed doubts as to the future of the young couple.

"Is it all over?" one of the most eminent personages in the city asked Madame Evangélista.

"We had so many documents to read and listen to, that we are a little late; but our tardiness is excusable," she replied.

"For my part, I didn't hear a word," said Natalie, taking Paul's hand to open the ball.

"Those two young people both like to spend money, and the mother's not the one to hold them back," said a dowager.

"But they have founded a *majorat* worth fifty thousand a year, so they say."

"Bah!"

"I see that Good Monsieur Mathias's hand in this," said a magistrate. "I haven't any doubt that, if it's as you say, it's because the excellent man was determined to save the future of the family."

"Natalie's too pretty not to be an awful flirt. By the time she's been married two years," said a young woman, "I wouldn't dare say that Manerville won't be an unhappy man at home."

"Will it be time to prop up the *Fleur des Pois* then?" queried Solonet.

"He wouldn't need anything better than that long lath," said a girl.

"Don't you think Madame Evangélista has a dissatisfied look?"

"Why, my dear, some one just told me that she retains only twenty-five thousand a year, and what is that for her?"

"Destitution, my dear."

"Yes, she has stripped herself for her daughter. Monsieur Manerville was so exacting—"

"Excessively so!" said Master Solonet. "But he will be a peer of France. The Maulincours and the Vidame de Pamiers will be his sponsors; he belongs to the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"Oh! he's received there, that's all," said a lady who had tried to get him for a son-in-law. "Madoiselle Evangélista, a merchant's daughter, certainly won't open the gates of the Chapter of Cologne to him."

"She's a grandniece of the Duke of Casa-Réal."

"In the female line!"

All such remarks were soon exhausted. The gamblers began their game, the young men and maidens danced, the supper was served, and toward morning the noise of the fête died away, just as the first rays of dawn began to shine in at the windows. Having said adieu to Paul, who was the last to go, Madame Evangélista went up to her daughter's room, for hers had been taken by the architect to

enlarge the scene of the festivities. Although Natalie and her mother were both overpowered with sleep, they exchanged a few words when they were alone.

"Tell me, dear mother, what is vexing you?"

"My angel, I have found out this evening how far a mother's affection can go. You know nothing of business and you have no idea to what suspicions my honor has been exposed. However, I trampled my pride under my feet; our happiness and our reputation were at stake."

"You mean about the diamonds? Poor boy, he fairly wept over it. He wouldn't take them, so I have them."

"Go to sleep, dear child. We will talk business when we wake up; for we have business to discuss," she said, with a sigh, "and now a third person has come in between us."

"Ah! dear mother, Paul will never be an obstacle to our happiness," were Natalie's last words as she fell asleep.

"Poor little pet, she doesn't know that that man has ruined her!"

Madame Evangélista was thereupon seized by the first idea of the avarice to which people of mature years eventually become victims. She determined to reconstruct for her daughter's benefit the whole fortune left by Evangélista. She considered that her honor was pledged to do it. Her love for Natalie made her in a twinkling as skilful a calculator as she had hitherto been reckless and extravagant. She

considered the advisability of making the most of her capital, after investing a part in the funds, which were at that time worth about eighty francs. A passion often changes a whole character in a moment: the rash man becomes diplomatic, the coward suddenly turns brave. Hatred rendered the prodigal Madame Evangélista a miser. Wealth might serve to forward the projects of revenge, still ill-defined and confused, which she proposed to mature at her leisure. She fell asleep, saying to herself: "Until to-morrow!" By an inexplicable phenomenon, the effects of which, however, are familiar to thinkers, her mind, while she slept, worked over her ideas, cleared them up, set them in order, suggested to her a method of exerting a controlling influence over Paul's life, and furnished her with a plan which she put in execution the following day.

Although the excitement of the fête had driven away the anxious thoughts that had assailed Paul at different times, they returned to torment him when he was alone and in his bed.

"It seems," he said to himself, "that, except for dear old Mathias, I should have been taken in by my mother-in-law. Is it possible? What motive could have induced her to deceive me? Are we not to combine our fortunes and live together? However, what's the use of worrying? In a few days Natalie will be my wife, our interests are well defined, nothing can come between us. Come what may! Nevertheless, I'll be on my guard. If Mathias was

right, why, after all, I'm not obliged to marry my mother-in-law."

In this second battle, Paul's future prospects had entirely changed without his knowledge. Of the two women he was to marry, the cleverer had become his deadly enemy and was intent upon separating her interests from his. Incapable as he was of remarking the difference between his mother-in-law and other women, due to the Creole character, he was even less able to suspect her profound cunning. The Creole nature is a thing apart; it is European in intelligence, tropical in the illogical violence of its passions, Indian in the apathetic heedlessness with which it does or suffers good or evil; an attractive nature withal, but dangerous as a child is dangerous if he is not watched. Like the child, the Creole must have whatever she wants instantly; like the child she would set fire to the house to boil an egg. In her slothful, listless life she thinks of nothing; she thinks of everything when her passions are aroused. She has something of the treachery of the negroes who have surrounded her from her cradle, but she is as innocent as they. Like them and like children, she has the faculty of constantly wishing for the same thing with an increasing intensity of desire, and can sit like a brooding-hen upon an idea to make it hatch. A strange assemblage of estimable qualities and defects, which in the case of Madame Evangélista her Spanish blood had accentuated, and over which French courtesy had spread its mirror-like polish.

This nature, which had been lulled to sleep by happiness for sixteen years, engrossed since then by the frivolities of society, and to which its first hatred had disclosed its strength, awoke with the fury of a conflagration; it burst forth at a time of life when a woman loses her dearest affections and seeks new sustenance for the activity that consumes her. Natalie was to remain for three more days under her mother's influence! Madame Evangélista, the vanquished, had therefore one day, the last day a daughter passes with her mother. By a single word, the Creole could influence the lives of these two mortals destined to walk together through the highways and byways of Parisian society, for Natalie had blind confidence in her mother. What tremendous weight advice would have upon a mind thus prepossessed! Its whole future might be determined by a single phrase. No code, no human institution can anticipate the moral crime that kills by a word. Therein lies the defect of social justice; therein lies the distinction between the morals of the upper classes and the morals of the people; the one is hypocritical, the other outspoken; for the one, the venom of speech or ideas, for the other, the knife; for the one, impunity, for the other, death.

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The next day, about noon, Madame Evangélista was half-lying on the edge of Natalie's bed. During the drowsy waking hour they fondled and caressed each other, recalling the happy memories of their life together during which no suspicion of discord had marred the harmony of their sentiments, the sympathy of their ideas, or the mutuality of their enjoyments.

"Poor little love," said the mother, weeping genuine tears, "it is impossible for me not to be moved when I think that after you have done as you pleased so many years, to-morrow evening you will belong to a man whom you will have to obey."

"Oh! dear mother, as to obeying him!—" said Natalie, with a graceful movement of the head expressive of dissent. "You laugh?" she continued. "Didn't my father always gratify your whims? Why? Because he loved you. Shall I not be loved, too, pray?"

"Yes, Paul loves you; but if a married woman doesn't take care, nothing vanishes so quickly as conjugal love. The influence a wife is to have over her husband depends upon the way she begins her married life; you will need good advice."

"But you will be with us—"

"Perhaps, dear child! Last night, during the ball, I reflected a great deal upon the dangers of our

living together. If my presence should be an injury to you, if the little acts by which you must gradually establish your authority as a wife should be attributed to my influence, would not your household become a hell on earth? At the first frown your husband indulged in, should I not, being as proud as I am, leave the house instantly? If I am likely to leave it sooner or later, my opinion is that it's better not to enter it at all. I should never forgive your husband for causing disunion between us. On the other hand, when you are the mistress, when your husband is to you what your father was to me, that disaster will be no longer to be feared. Although this policy may be painful to a young and tender heart like yours, your happiness requires that you should be an absolute sovereign under your own roof."

"Then, mother, why did you tell me that I must obey him?"

"Dear pet, to enable a woman to command, she must always have the appearance of doing what her husband wishes. If you didn't know that, you might by an unseasonable revolt destroy your future. Paul is a weak youth, he might allow himself to be governed by a friend, he might even fall under the dominion of a woman, who would make you feel the effect of their influence. Avoid such annoyances as these by making yourself mistress of him. Isn't it better that he should be governed by you than by anybody else?"

"Yes, indeed," said Natalie. "I can have no object but his happiness."

"And I, my dear child, may take the liberty to think exclusively of yours, and to wish that, in a matter of so much importance, you should not be left without a compass in the midst of the reefs you are sure to encounter."

"But, my darling mother, aren't we both strong enough to remain together with him, without provoking the frown you seem to dread? Paul loves you, mamma."

"Oh! oh! he fears me more than he loves me. Watch him carefully to-day when I tell him that I propose to let you go to Paris without me—you will see heartfelt delight on his face, whatever pains he may take to conceal it."

"Why?" queried Natalie.

"Why, dear child? I am like Saint-Chrysostom, I will tell him why, before you."

"But suppose I consent to marry solely on condition that I am not to leave you?" said Natalie.

"Our separation has become necessary," continued Madame Evangélista, "for there are several considerations which have modified my plans for the future. I am ruined. You will have a most brilliant existence in Paris, and I could not live comfortably there without running through the little I have left; whereas if I live at Lanstrac I can look after your interests, and rebuild my fortune by living economically."

"You, mamma, live economically?—" cried Natalie in a tone of raillery. "Pray don't play the grandmother already. What! you would leave me

for such reasons? Dear mother, Paul may seem a little stupid to you, but he's not in the least degree selfish—"

"Ah!" rejoined Madame Evangélista in a tone pregnant with meaning, which made Natalie's heart beat faster, "the discussion we had over the contract has made me suspicious and aroused some doubt in my mind. But don't be alarmed, dear child," she said, putting her arm about her daughter's neck and drawing her close to kiss her, "I shan't leave you alone long. When my return to you will no longer cause trouble, when Paul has found me out, we will resume our pleasant little life together, our evening chats—"

"Why, mother, can you live without your Ninie?"

"Yes, dear angel, because I shall live for you. Will not my mother-heart be always content with the thought that I am contributing, as I ought, to your fortune?"

"But, my darling, adorable mother, am I to be left alone with Paul at once? What will become of me? how will it be? What must I do, what mustn't I do?"

"Poor little love, do you think I propose to abandon you so at the first battle? We will write each other three times a week, like two lovers, and thus we shall be always heart to heart. Nothing will happen to you that I don't know of, and I will keep you safe from all harm. Then it would be too absurd for me not to come and see you, for it would

be casting a slur upon your husband; I will always pass a month or two with you in Paris."

"Alone, alone so soon with him!" exclaimed Natalie in dismay, interrupting her mother.

"Isn't it necessary for you to be his wife?"

"I want to be; but, at least, tell me how I ought to act; you did whatever you wanted with my father and you know all about it; I will obey you blindly."

Madame Evangélista kissed Natalie on the brow; she longed for and expected this request.

"My child, my advice must be adapted to the circumstances. Men do not resemble one another. The lion and the frog are less unlike, morally speaking, than one man and another. Do I know to-day what will happen to-morrow? I can give you now only general advice as to your conduct as a whole."

"Dear mother, pray tell me quickly all you know."

"In the first place, my dear child, the cause of the undoing of married women who are bent upon retaining their husbands' hearts—and retaining their hearts," she said parenthetically, "is one and the same thing with ruling them—the principal cause of conjugal discord is the constant communication which did not exist in the old days but was introduced into this country with the family mania. Since the French Revolution, bourgeois customs have invaded aristocratic circles. This sad state of things is due to one of their writers, Rousseau, a shameless heretic, who had none but anti-social thoughts, and who, nobody knows how, made the

most unreasonable things seem right. He claimed that all women had the same rights and the same powers; that in the social state nature must be obeyed; as if the wife of a Spanish grandee, as if you and I had anything in common with a woman of the people! And since then, women in the best society have nursed their own children, educated their daughters themselves and remained at home. Thus life is so complicated that happiness has become almost impossible, for such sympathy between two characters, as has made it possible for us to live together as friends, is a rare exception. Perpetual contact is no less dangerous between children and their parents than between husband and wife. There are few hearts in which love can resist the strain of omnipresence—that attribute belongs to God alone. Therefore place the barriers of society between Paul and yourself; go to the ball, to the Opéra; drive in the afternoon, dine out at night, make a great many calls, give Paul but few moments of your time. By pursuing that system, you will lose nothing of your value. When two people have nothing but sentiment to carry them to the end of their lives, they soon exhaust its resources; and indifference, satiety, distaste soon make their appearance. Once sentiment is withered, what is to become of them? Understand that extinct affection is replaced only by indifference or contempt. Therefore be always young, always new to him. He may perhaps weary you, but never be a bore to him. To know how to be bored at the proper time

is one of the elements of every sort of power. You two cannot give variety to your happiness by looking after your fortune nor by household duties; and so if you do not make your husband share your social duties, if you do not amuse him, you will both reach a frightful state of degeneracy. There begins the *spleen* of love. But we always love the one who entertains us or who makes us happy. To confer happiness and to receive it are two systems of female conduct separated by a deep chasm."

"Dear mother, I listen but I don't understand."

"If you love Paul to the extent of doing whatever he wants, if he makes you genuinely happy, that's all that is necessary; you won't be mistress, and the sagest precepts will not help you."

"That is clearer; I understand the rule but I can't apply it," laughed Natalie. "I have the theory, the practice will come."

"My poor Ninie," continued the mother, letting fall a real tear as she thought of her daughter's marriage and pressing her to her heart, "things will happen to you which you will not forget. Understand, my Natalie," she resumed after a pause, during which their arms were thrown about each other in a sympathetic embrace, "we women all have destinies of our own, just as the men have their vocations. Thus a woman is born to be a leader of society, a fascinating hostess, just as a man is born a general or a poet. Your vocation is to please. Your education, too, has fitted you for society. To-day, women should be educated for the salon as

they were formerly for the gynceum. You were not made to be the mother of a family nor to become a manager of property. If you have children, I hope they won't come in such a way as to spoil your shape the day after you're married; nothing is more vulgar than to be enceinte a month after the wedding, and besides, that proves that your husband doesn't love you too well. If you do have children, after you've been married two or three years, let governesses and tutors bring them up. Do you be the great lady who represents the pleasure and the splendor of the family; but let your superiority be apparent only in the things that flatter men's self-esteem, and conceal the superiority that you succeed in acquiring in important things."

"You frighten me, dear mamma!" cried Natalie. "How can I remember all these precepts? How can such a giddy child as I am calculate the effect of everything and reflect before acting?"

"My dear little girl, I am only telling you to-day what you would learn hereafter, purchasing your experience by painful mistakes, by errors of conduct which would cause you regret and would embarrass you all your life."

"But where am I to begin?" said Natalie innocently.

"Instinct will guide you," her mother replied. "At this moment, Paul desires you much more than he loves you; for love produced by desire is a hope, and that which follows after the satisfaction of desire is the reality. There, my dear, will be the

source of your power, therein lies the solution of the whole question. What woman is not loved the day before? Be loved on the day after and you will be for ever. Paul is a weak man, who quickly moulds himself to habits; if he yields to you once, he will always yield. A woman who is ardently desired can demand anything: don't be so foolish as I have known many women to be, who have failed to realize the importance of the first hours, when we really reign, and employ them in stupid nonsense that passes all bounds. Make use of the empire your husband's first passion will give you to accustom him to obey you. But select for the test the most unreasonable thing you can think of, in order to measure the extent of your power by the extent of his concession. What merit would there be in making him consent to a reasonable request? Would it be you he was obeying? We must always take the bull by the horns, says a Castilian proverb; when he has once seen the uselessness of his defences and his strength, he is subdued. If your husband does a foolish thing for you, you will rule him."

"Mon Dieu! why so?"

"Because, my child, marriage lasts through life, and a husband isn't like other men. So never be guilty of the folly of putting yourself in his power in anything, no matter what it is. Maintain a constant reserve in your discourse and in your acts; you can even go so far as to treat him coldly, without danger; for you can modify that treatment as

you will, while there is nothing beyond extravagant expressions of love. A husband, my dear, is the only man with whom a woman can never allow herself to unbend. Moreover, nothing is easier than to maintain your dignity. The words: 'Your wife ought not, your wife cannot do or say this or that thing!' are the great talisman. A woman's whole life is contained in her: 'I cannot! I will not!' *I cannot* is the irresistible argument of the weakness that lies in bed and weeps and fascinates. *I will not* is the last argument. A woman's strength then manifests itself to its fullest extent, and so it should be employed only on serious occasions. Success depends entirely on the way in which a woman makes use of those two sentences, emphasizes them, and varies them. But there is a better method of domination than these, which seem likely to cause discussion. I, my dear, reigned by faith. If your husband believe in you, you can do anything with him. To inspire this faith in him, you must persuade him that you understand him. And don't imagine that it's a simple thing to do: a woman can always prove to a man that she loves him, but it is more difficult to make him admit that he is understood. It is my duty to tell you everything, my child, for life with its complications, life in which two wills are to do their best to agree, begins for you to-morrow. Do you realize this difficulty? The best way to secure accord between your two wills, is to arrange matters so that there shall be but one will in the house. Many people claim that a

woman brings disaster upon her own head by thus changing her rôle; but, my dear, in this way a woman secures the power to guide events instead of submitting to them, and that single advantage makes up for all possible drawbacks."

Natalie kissed her mother's hands, leaving tears of gratitude upon them. Like all women in whom physical passion does not arouse moral passion, she understood all at once the bearing of this subtle female logic; but, like a spoiled child, who does not yield to the most convincing arguments and obstinately reiterates his desire, she returned to the charge with one of the personal arguments suggested by the straightforward logic of children.

"Dear mother," said she, "a few days ago, you talked so much about the necessary preparations for securing Paul's advancement which you alone could direct; why have you changed your mind, leaving us to our own devices in this way?"

"I did not then know the extent of my obligations nor the amount of my debts," replied her mother, unwilling to disclose her secret. "But within a year or two I'll give you a sufficient answer to that question.—Paul will soon be here, let us dress! Be as kittenish and agreeable as you were—you remember?—the evening we talked over that fatal contract, for to-day we have to try and save a few family relics, and secure for you something to which I am superstitiously attached."

"What is that?"

"The *Discreto*."

*

Paul came about four o'clock. Although as he greeted his mother-in-law he struggled to impart an affable expression to his features, Madame Evangélista saw upon his brow the clouds that the counsels of the night and the reflections of the morning had amassed there.

"Mathias has spoken!" she said to herself, with an inward determination to destroy the old notary's work.—"My dear boy," said she to him, "you left your diamonds in the console, and I confess that I would be glad if I never need see again the things that came near making trouble between us. Besides, as Mathias said, you must sell them to provide for the first payment on the estates you have bought."

"They are no longer mine," said he, "I gave them to Natalie, so that when you saw them on her you would forget the annoyance they have caused you."

Madame Evangélista seized Paul's hand and pressed it warmly, wiping away a tear of emotion.

"Listen to me, my dear children," said she, looking at Natalie and Paul, "if that's the way it is, I am going to suggest a little transaction. I am obliged to sell my pearl necklace and my earrings. Yes, Paul, I prefer not to put a sou of my fortune in an annuity; I don't forget what I owe you. Well, I

admit my weakness—it seems to me that to sell the *Discreto* would be a calamity. Sell a diamond that bears the surname of Philip II., and was worn upon his royal hand,—an historic stone that the Duke of Alva caressed for ten years upon the hilt of his sword—no, it shall not be. Elie Magus appraised my necklace and earrings at something more than a hundred thousand francs; let us exchange them for the jewels I turn over to you to fulfil my obligations to my daughter; you will be the gainer by it, but what is that to me? I am not interested. And then, Paul, with our savings you can amuse yourself by putting together a diadem for Natalie, or a superb cluster, diamond for diamond. Instead of having those fancy arrangements, those gewgaws which are fashionable only among second-rate folk, your wife will have magnificent diamonds in which she will take real satisfaction. Sale for sale, isn't it better to get rid of those antiquated things, and to keep these lovely jewels in the family?

“But, what about yourself, mother?” said Paul.

“I,” replied Madame Evangélista, “oh! I don't need anything now. I am going to be your farmer at Lanstrac. Wouldn't it be madness for me to go to Paris when I ought to be picking up the remains of my fortune here? I am becoming a miser for my grandchildren.”

“Dear mother,” said Paul, deeply moved, “ought I to accept this exchange without compensating you?”

“Great God! are not you two the dearest interests

I have in life? Do you think it won't be true happiness to me to say to myself as I sit in my chimney-corner: 'Natalie goes this evening, beautiful as a queen, to a ball at the Duchesse de Berri's. When she sees my diamond at her throat, my earrings in her ears, she feels the little thrill of gratified self-esteem that contributes so greatly to a woman's happiness, and makes her joyous and fascinating!' Nothing saddens a woman more than the feeling of wounded vanity; I never have known a badly dressed woman to be agreeable or good-humored. Come, Paul, be just! we take much more pleasure in the enjoyment of one we love than in our own enjoyment."

"Great heaven, what did Mathias mean?" thought Paul.—"Very well, mamma, I accept," he said, in a low voice.

"I am entirely at sea," said Natalie.

At this juncture, Solonet arrived with good news for his client; he had found, among the speculators of his acquaintance, two contractors who were inclined to buy the house, because the great size of the garden afforded fine opportunities for building.

"They offer two hundred and fifty thousand francs," said he; "but, if you agree, I can bring them up to three hundred thousand. You have two acres of garden."

"My husband paid two hundred thousand francs for the whole property, so I consent," said she, "but you will reserve for me the furniture, the mirrors—"

"Aha!" said Solonet, laughingly, "you have an eye to business."

"Alas! I am obliged to have," she replied, with a sigh.

"I understand that many people will come to your midnight mass," said Solonet, who thereupon took his leave, seeing that he was in the way.

Madame Evangélista followed him to the door, and said in his ear:

"I now have two hundred and fifty thousand francs of my own; if I retain two hundred thousand from the price of the house, I can get together a little capital of four hundred and fifty thousand. I want to invest it to the best possible advantage and I rely upon you for that. I shall probably remain at Lanstrac."

The young notary kissed his client's hand with a grateful gesture; for the widow's accent led him to think that this alliance, based upon interested motives, would possibly extend a little farther.

"You can rely upon me," said he. "I will find opportunities to invest in property on which you will run no risk and make large profits—"

"I will see you to-morrow," said she, "for you and Monsieur de Gyas are our witnesses."

"Why do you refuse to come to Paris, dear mother?" said Paul. "Natalie is pouting at me as if I were the cause of your resolution."

"I have thought seriously on that subject, my children; I should be in your way. You would feel obliged to have me for a third in whatever you did.

and young people have ideas of their own which I might possibly run counter to. Go to Paris alone. I have no desire to continue to exercise over the Comtesse de Manerville the mild sway I have exercised over Natalie; I must leave her to you absolutely. You see, Paul, she and I have some joint habits that must be broken off. My influence must give way to yours. I want you to be fond of me, and to believe that I have your interest more at heart than you imagine in this matter. Sooner or later, young husbands are jealous of their wives' affection for their mothers. Perhaps they are right. When you are truly united, when love has melted your hearts into one, why then, my dear child, you will cease to dread the presence of a conflicting influence in your house, when you see me there. I know the world, and men and things; I have seen many households thrown into confusion by the blind love of mothers who make themselves unendurable to their daughters as well as to their sons-in-law. The affection of old people is often exacting and crotchety. Perhaps I might not know how to keep myself out of sight. I am weak enough to fancy that I am still beautiful and there are flatterers who try to prove to me that I am still lovable, so I might have some embarrassing pretensions. Let me make one more sacrifice to your welfare; I have given you my fortune, and now I abandon for you my last remnant of vanity as a woman. Your Père Mathias is an old man and couldn't look after your property; I will be your manager, I will make

for myself the duties that all old people should have, sooner or later; then, when it is necessary, I will come to Paris to help on your ambitious projects. Come, Paul, tell me frankly, doesn't my decision please you?"

Paul refused to admit such a thing, but he was very happy to have his liberty. The suspicions the old notary had aroused as to his mother-in-law's character were dissipated in an instant by this conversation, which Madame Evangélista resumed and continued in the same tone.

"My mother was right," thought Natalie, who had kept a close watch upon Paul's face. "He is very glad to know I am to be separated from her.—Why?"

Was not that *why* the first question asked by distrust, and did it not impart considerable weight to the maternal counsels?

There are certain natures which believe in friendship on the faith of a single manifestation thereof. In people so constituted, the north wind scatters the clouds as swiftly as the west wind brings them together; they pause at effects without going back to causes. Paul's was such an essentially confiding nature, free from evil sentiments, but devoid of foresight as well. His weakness was much more attributable to his kindness of heart, to his trust in his fellow-men, than to any moral failing.

Natalie was sad and thoughtful, for she did not know how she could get along without her mother. Paul, with the sort of fatuity born of love, laughed at the melancholy expression of his wife that was

soon to be, saying to himself that the joys of married life and the excitement of Paris would soon dispel it. Madame Evangélista was extremely pleased to observe Paul's confidence, for the first element of vengeance is dissimulation. An avowed hatred is powerless. The Creole had already made two long strides. Her daughter was already wealthy in the possession of a superb set of jewels which cost Paul two hundred thousand francs, and which he would undoubtedly complete. Then she had decided to leave the two children to their own devices, without other adviser than their illogical love. Thus she was making ready her vengeance, unknown to her daughter, who, sooner or later, would be her accomplice. Would Natalie love Paul? That was a question still unsolved, the solution of which might modify her plans, for she loved her daughter too sincerely not to respect her happiness. Paul's future therefore still depended on himself. If he won his wife's love, he was saved.

On the following night, at midnight, after passing the evening *en famille* with the four witnesses whom Madame Evangélista regaled with the long repast which follows the legal marriage, the bride and groom and their friends attended a mass by torchlight at which a hundred or more curious persons were present. A marriage celebrated at night always inspires presages of evil in the mind; light is a symbol of life and pleasure, whose joyful presages are wanting at such times. Do you ask the bravest heart why

its blood runs cold? why the cold darkness of the arches overhead enervates it? why it trembles at the sound of footsteps? why it notices the cry of the screech-owls? Although there is no reason for trembling, everyone trembles, and the shadows, symbols of death, depress the mind. Natalie, separated from her mother, was weeping. The young girl was tormented by all the doubts and fears that seize the heart upon entering upon a new life, where, notwithstanding the most convincing assurances of happiness, innumerable pitfalls exist, into which women are wont to fall. She was cold, she must have a cloak. The attitude of Madame Evangélista and of the young husband and wife occasioned some comment among the fashionable crowd around the altar.

"Solonet just told me that the bride and groom start for Paris, alone, to-morrow."

"Madame Evangélista was to go and live with them."

"Comte Paul has got rid of her already."

"What a blunder!" said the Marquise de Gyas. "To close the door to his wife's mother, is the same thing as opening it to a lover, isn't it? He doesn't know what a mother is, I fancy."

"He has been very hard on Madame Evangélista; the poor woman has sold her house and is going to live at Lanstrac."

"Natalie is very sad."

"Would you like to wake up and find yourself on the high road the day after your wedding?"

"It's very hard."

"I am very glad I came here," said one lady, "to convince myself of the necessity of celebrating a marriage with all the customary pomp and festivities; for I think all this is very dull and depressing. And if you want me to tell you the whole of my thought," she added, putting her lips to her neighbor's ear, "this wedding seems to me an indecent affair."

Madame Evangélista took Natalie in her carriage and drove her to Comte Paul's house.

"Well, mother dear, it's all over—"

"Remember my last injunctions, my dear child, and you will be happy. Be his wife always, not his mistress."

When Natalie had retired, the mother went through with the little comedy of throwing herself weeping into her son-in-law's arms. It was the only provincial thing that Madame Evangélista permitted herself to indulge in, but she had her reasons. Through her tears and her apparently wild and despairing words, she obtained from Paul such concessions as husbands make. The next morning she put the young couple in their carriage and accompanied them just beyond the ferry across the Gironde. By a single word, Natalie informed Madame Evangélista that, although Paul had won the game of the contract, her revenge had begun. Natalie had already obtained from her husband a promise of unquestioning obedience.



CONCLUSION

Five years later, one afternoon in the month of November, Comte Paul de Manerville, wrapped in a cloak, with head bent forward, glided mysteriously into Monsieur Mathias's house at Bordeaux. That excellent man, being too old to continue in business, had sold his office and was passing his last days in peaceful retirement in one of his houses. He was unavoidably absent on urgent business when his guest arrived; but his old housekeeper, being informed of Paul's arrival, escorted him to the bedroom of the late Madame Mathias, who had been dead a year. Thoroughly spent by rapid traveling, Paul slept till evening. On his return, the old man went up to see his former client and contented himself with looking at him as he lay asleep, as a mother looks at her child. Josette, the housekeeper, accompanied her master, and stood at the foot of the bed with her arms akimbo.

"It is just a year to-day, Josette, that I watched my dear wife draw her last breath in this room, and I didn't think then that I should return to see Monsieur le Comte lying here as if he were dead."

"Poor man! he groans in his sleep," said Josette.

The old notary replied only by a "*Sac à Papier!*"

a harmless oath which in his mouth always indicated the despair of the man of business in the press of unconquerable difficulties.

"At all events," said he, "I have saved the reversion of Lanstrac, Auzac, Saint-Froult and his house for him!"

He counted up on his fingers and cried:

"Five years! it was five years ago this very month that his old aunt, the venerable Madame de Maulincour, now deceased, requested for him the hand of that little crocodile in woman's clothes who has finally ruined him as I expected."

Having gazed for a long while at the young man, the good old gouty fellow, leaning on his cane, went out to walk slowly back and forth in his little garden. At nine o'clock, supper was served, for Mathias was in the habit of supping late. The old man was not slightly astonished to see Paul appear with unclouded brow and serene expression, although sensibly altered. If at thirty-three years, the Comte de Manerville seemed to be forty, the change in appearance was due entirely to moral upheavals; physically he was still in good condition. He took the old man's hands to force him to remain seated and pressed them affectionately as he said:

"Dear, kind Master Mathias! you have had your sorrows, too!"

"Mine came in the ordinary course of nature, Monsieur le Comte; but yours—"

"We will talk of my affairs while we take supper."

"If I hadn't a son in the magistracy, and a married daughter," said the old man, "believe me, Monsieur le Comte, you would have found something besides hospitality under old Mathias's roof. Why do you come to Bordeaux just when the passers-by are reading upon all the blank walls the notices of the sale on execution of the farms of Guadet and Grassol, the vineyard of Bellerose and your house in town? It is impossible for me to describe my bitter grief when I see those huge placards—I, who, for forty years, have looked after those estates as if they belonged to me, I, who, as the third clerk of the worthy Monsieur Chesneau, my predecessor, purchased them for your mother, and who, with my own third clerk's hand, wrote out the deeds on parchment in a fine round hand! I, who have the title-deeds in my successor's office, and who made all the settlements! I, who knew you when you were no taller than that!" said the notary, holding his hand within two feet of the floor. "A man must have been a notary forty-one years and a half to know the sort of grief it causes me to see my name printed in large letters for Israel to stare at, in the returns of the levy and the abstract of title. When I walk along the street and see people reading those horrible yellow posters, I am as ashamed as if it were a matter of my own ruin and my own honor. There are some idiots who read it all out aloud for the express purpose of drawing a crowd; and they all seem bent upon making the most absurd comments. Isn't a man free to do what he pleases with

his own property? Your father ran through two fortunes before he built up the one he left you, and you wouldn't be a Manerville if you didn't imitate him. Besides, sales on execution form the subject of a whole chapter in the Code, they were expressly provided for, and you are in a position that the law gives you the right to occupy. If I were not a white-haired old man who is waiting for nothing but a nudge from somebody's elbow to fall into the grave, I would horsewhip the curs who stop in front of such abominations as this: *Upon the petition of Dame Natalie Evangélista, wife of Paul-François-Joseph, Comte de Manerville, holding her property separate in her own right by virtue of the decree of the court of first instance of the Department of the Seine, etc.*"

"Yes," said Paul, "and now separated in body as well—"

"Aha!" the old man exclaimed.

"Oh! against Natalie's will," said the count eagerly, "it was necessary for me to deceive her, she knows nothing of my going away."

"You are going away?"

"My passage is all paid, and I sail on the *Belle-Amélie* for Calcutta."

"In two days!" said the old man. "Then we shall never meet again, Monsieur le Comte."

"You are only seventy-three years old, my dear Mathias, and you have the gout, a veritable patent of old age. When I return, I shall find you still on your feet. Your good old head and your heart are

still sound and you will help me to rebuild the tottering edifice. I propose to make a handsome fortune in seven years. When I come home, I shall be only forty. Everything is possible at that age."

"You!" said Mathias, unable to restrain a gesture of amazement; "you go into business, Monsieur le Comte! can you think of such a thing?"

"I am no longer Monsieur le Comte, dear Mathias. My passage is taken under the name of Camille, one of my mother's baptismal names. Then I have acquaintances who make it possible for me to make a fortune in other ways. Business will be my last chance. In fact I start with sufficient money to enable me to tempt fortune on a large scale."

"Where is the money?"

"A friend is to send it to me."

The old man dropped his fork when he heard the word *friend*, not in mockery or surprise; his face expressed the grief he felt at finding Paul under the influence of a treacherous illusion; for his eye saw nothing but a bottomless pit where the count saw a solid plank.

"I have practised the profession of notary for well-nigh fifty years, and I never knew a ruined man to have friends who would lend him money!"

"You don't know De Marsay! While I speak to you I am sure that he has sold *rentes*, if necessary, and to-morrow you will receive a bill of exchange for fifty thousand crowns."

"I trust I shall. Couldn't this friend arrange your affairs, pray? You could have lived quietly at

Lanstrac six or seven years on Madame la Comtesse's income."

"Would an assignment have settled debts amounting to fifteen hundred thousand francs, five hundred and fifty thousand of which are owed by my wife?"

"How have you run into debt fourteen hundred and fifty thousand francs in four years?"

"Nothing could be clearer, Mathias. Didn't I give my wife the diamonds? Didn't I spend the hundred and fifty thousand that came to us out of the price of the Evangélista house in fitting up my house in Paris? Didn't I have to pay here the expenses of our purchases and those occasioned by my marriage contract? Lastly, didn't we have to sell Natalie's forty thousand a year to buy Auzac and Saint-Froult? We sold at 87, so that I owed nearly two hundred thousand francs when I'd been married a month. We had sixty-seven thousand a year left. We have always spent that and two hundred thousand more. Add to these nine hundred thousand francs considerable usurious interest and you will easily make up a million."

"Phew!" said the old notary. "Well?"

"Well, in the first place, I wanted to complete my wife's set of jewels, which was begun with the pearl necklace with the *Discreto*, a family diamond, for a clasp, and her mother's earrings. I paid a hundred thousand francs for a coronet of clusters of diamonds. That takes us to eleven hundred thousand. I find that I owe my wife's fortune, amounting to the

three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs of her dowry."

"But," said Mathias, "if Madame la Comtesse had pledged her diamonds and you your income, you would have had, by my reckoning, three hundred thousand francs with which to keep your creditors quiet—"

"When a man is down, Mathias, when his property is loaded with mortgages, when his wife's claims outrank creditors, when that man's name is on notes of hand for a hundred thousand francs, which will be paid, I hope, by the high price at which my property should sell, nothing can be done. What about the costs of a forced sale?"

"Frightful!" said the notary.

"Luckily the levies on execution have been changed to voluntary sales, to cut down the expense."

"Sell Bellerose," cried Mathias, "when the crop of 1825 is in the cellars!"

"I can do nothing."

"Bellerose is worth six hundred thousand francs."

"Natalie will buy it in, I have advised her to do it."

"Sixteen thousand francs in average years and possibilities, such as 1825! I will myself bid Bellerose up to seven hundred thousand francs, and each of the farms to a hundred and eighty thousand."

"So much the better! then I shall be clear if my Bordeaux house brings two hundred thousand."

"Solonet will pay something more for it, for he wants it badly. He is about to retire with something over a hundred thousand a year, made by speculating in spirits. He has sold his business for three hundred thousand francs, and is to marry a rich mulatto—God knows where she got her money, but they say she's worth millions. A notary speculate in spirits! a notary marry a mulatto! What an age! He invested your mother-in-law's funds to good advantage, they say."

"She has greatly improved Lanstrac and looked after the property; she has paid her rent punctually."

"I should never have thought her capable of doing as she has done."

"She is so kind and devoted; she always paid Natalie's debts during the three months she passed at Paris."

"Well she might, for she lives on Lanstrac," said Mathias. "She! become economical? what a miracle! She has just bought Grainrouge between Lanstrac and Grassol, so that, if she continues the Lanstrac avenue to the main road, you can travel a league and a half on your estates. She paid a hundred thousand in cash for Grainrouge, which is worth a thousand crowns a year to anybody."

"She is still beautiful," said Paul. "Country life keeps her in good condition; I won't go to say adieu to her, for she'd bleed herself for me."

"You would go for nothing, for she's in Paris. She must have arrived there just as you left."

"She heard that my property was to be sold, no doubt, and went to my assistance. I have no right to complain of life. I am loved, certainly as dearly as a man can be loved in this world, loved by two women who rival each other in their devotion to me; they were jealous of each other, the daughter reproved the mother for loving me too well, the mother, the daughter for her extravagance. Their affection has been my ruin. How can one avoid gratifying the slightest whims of a woman one loves? How can one defend one's self! But also how accept these sacrifices? Yes, we certainly might turn my property into money and come to Lanstrac to live; but I prefer to go to the Indies and bring back a fortune from there, rather than tear Natalie away from the life she loves. Therefore, I was the one who proposed the division of property. Women are angels who must never be compelled to take a hand in the business of life."

Old Mathias listened to Paul with an expression of doubt, mingled with wonder.

"You have no children?" he said.

"Luckily," Paul replied.

"I have a different idea of marriage," said the old notary naively. "In my view, a woman ought to share her husband's lot, be it good or bad. I have heard it said that young married people who loved like lovers had no children. Is pleasure then the only object of marriage? Is it not rather happiness and a family? But you were barely twenty-eight and Madame la Comtesse twenty; you were

excusable for thinking only of love. However, the nature of your contract and your name—do you find me too much the notary?—everything combined to make it your duty to produce a good lusty boy. Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and if you had had daughters, you shouldn't have stopped until you had a male child who would have placed the *majorat* on a firm foundation. Wasn't Mademoiselle Evangélista strong and healthy? had she any reason to fear maternity? You will tell me that that's an old-fashioned method of our ancestors; but in noble families, Monsieur le Comte, a lawful wife ought to bear children and bring them up well; as the Duchesse de Sully, the great Sully's wife, used to say, a woman is not an instrument of pleasure, but the honor and virtue of the family."

"You don't know women, my dear Mathias," said Paul. "To be happy, you must love them as they want to be loved. Isn't there something brutal in depriving a woman of her advantages so soon, in spoiling her beauty before she has ever enjoyed it?"

"If you had had children, the mother would have checked the wife's extravagance, she would have remained at home—"

"If you were right, my dear sir," said Paul, with a frown, "I should be still more unhappy. Do not exaggerate my unhappiness by a moral lecture after the fall, let me go away without any afterthoughts."

The next day, Mathias received a bill of exchange, payable at sight for a hundred and fifty thousand francs, sent by Henri de Marsay.

"You see," said Paul, "he doesn't write a word, he begins by accommodating me. Henri's is the most perfectly imperfect, the most unlawfully attractive nature that I know. If you knew from what a height that man, still young as he is, looks down upon vulgar sentiments and vulgar interests, and what a consummate politician he is, you would be as surprised as I have been to find how big a heart he has."

Mathias tried to shake Paul's determination, but it was irrevocable, and supported by so many plausible arguments, that the old notary abandoned the attempt to detain his client. It rarely happens that vessels in cargo sail promptly at the time appointed; but it so happened, fatally for Paul, that the wind was favorable and the *Belle-Amélie* was to sail the following day. As the hour approaches for a ship to sail, the wharf is always crowded with relatives, friends and idlers. Among those who were there on this occasion, some knew Manerville personally. His disaster made him as famous at that moment as he had formerly been by reason of his wealth; so there was a general movement of curiosity. Everyone had his word to say. The old man had accompanied him to the port, and his suffering must have been extreme, when he overheard some of these remarks.

"Who would recognize in that fellow yonder beside old Mathias, the dandy who was nicknamed the *Fleur des Pois*, and who was cock of the walk at Bordeaux five years ago?"

"What! that fat little man in an alpaca overcoat, who looks like a coachman,—can that be Comte Paul de Manerville?"

"Yes, my dear, the man who married Mademoiselle Evangélista. Here he is ruined, without a sou in his pocket, going to India to look for the magpie in the nest."

"But how did he ruin himself? He was so rich!"

"Paris, women, the Bourse, gambling, extravagance—"

"Then, too," said another, "Manerville's a poor fool, without any mind of his own, soft as papier-maché, incapable of anything under heaven, anybody can handle him. He was born ruined."

Paul pressed the old man's hand and took refuge on board the ship. Mathias remained on the pier, watching his former client, who leaned upon the rail defying the crowd with a disdainful glance. While the sailors were hauling up the anchor, Paul saw Mathias making signals to him with his handkerchief. The old housekeeper had come running up in hot haste to her master, who was evidently excited by some event of great importance. Paul begged the captain to delay a moment and to send a boat ashore in order to find out what the old notary wanted, he was motioning to him so energetically to come ashore. As he was too feeble to venture on board himself, Mathias handed two letters to one of the men who rowed the skiff.

"My good friend," said the former notary to the sailor, pointing to one of the letters he handed him,

"don't make any mistake about that package; it has been brought by a courier who made the journey from Paris in thirty-five hours. Be sure and tell that fact to Monsieur le Comte, don't forget it! it may lead him to change his mind."

"And then we must put him ashore?" asked the sailor.

"Yes, my friend," the notary imprudently replied.

In all countries, the sailor is generally a being apart, who almost always professes the most profound contempt for landsmen. As for the bourgeois, he does not understand them, he does not know what to make of them, he laughs at them, he steals from them if he can, without an idea that he is offending against the laws of probity. This man, as it happened, was a low Breton who grasped but one point in Master Mathias's injunctions.

"Set him ashore indeed!" he said to himself, as he rowed away; "make the captain lose a passenger! If a chap listened to those land-hogs we'd spend our lives getting 'em aboard and setting 'em ashore. Is he afraid his son'll catch cold?"

So he handed Paul the letters without a word. On recognizing his wife's writing and De Marsay's, he imagined all they might have to say to him, and would not allow himself to be influenced by the offers their devotion might inspire. So he placed their letters in his pocket with apparent indifference.

"That's what they hold us back for,—fol-de-rol!"

said the sailor to the captain in the Breton dialect. "If it was important, as yonder old marlinspike said, would Monsieur le Comte throw the letter into his locker?"

Absorbed by the sad thoughts that lay hold of the strongest men under such circumstances, Paul gave way to his melancholy as he waved his hand to his old friend, bade adieu to France and watched the buildings of Bordeaux as they rapidly receded from sight. He sat down upon a pile of rope. Darkness surprised him there, lost in reverie. With the twilight following the sunset came doubt; he looked forward into the future with anxious eye; probe it as he would, he could find naught there but peril and uncertainty, and he began to wonder if he did not lack courage. He was vaguely fearful as he thought of Natalie left to her own devices; he repented his determination, he regretted Paris and his past life. He fell a victim to seasickness. Everyone knows the effects of this malady: the most horrible of its sufferings, though unattended by danger, is a complete extinction of the will. An indescribable feeling of distress loosens the bonds of vitality at its centre, the mind is no longer conscious of its functions, and everything becomes a matter of indifference to the sufferer; a mother forgets her child, the lover ceases to think of his mistress, the strongest man lies like an inert mass. Paul was carried to his cabin, where he remained three days, flat on his back, by turns vomiting and gorged with *grog* by the sailors, thinking about

nothing and sleeping; then came a sort of convalescence and he recovered his ordinary state of health. On the morning that he went on deck for the first time, feeling somewhat better, to inhale the fresh sea-breezes of a new climate, he felt his letters when he put his hand in his pocket; he at once took them out to read them and began with Natalie's. In order that the Comtesse de Manerville's letter may be fully understood, it is necessary to insert the letter Paul had written to his wife upon leaving Paris:

PAUL DE MANERVILLE'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE.

"My best beloved, when you read this letter, I shall be far away from you; perhaps I shall be already upon the ship which is to take me to India, whither I am going to reconstruct my shattered fortune. I did not feel strong enough to tell you of my intention to go away. I have deceived you, but wasn't it necessary? You would have impoverished yourself to no purpose, you would have insisted upon sacrificing your fortune for me. Dear Natalie, do not reproach yourself, for I haven't a single regret. If I should bring back millions, I would imitate your father, I would lay them at your feet as he laid his at your mother's feet, saying: 'All is yours!' I love you madly, Natalie; I tell you so without having to fear that the confession will enable you to extend a power dreaded only by men of weak character; your power over me was without bounds the

day I first knew you. My love is the only accessory to my disaster. My steadily advancing ruin has afforded me the delirious enjoyment of the gambler. As my funds grew less, my happiness increased. Every fragment of my fortune as it was converted into some trifling pleasure for you was a source of celestial rapture to my heart. I would have liked you to have more caprices than you had. I knew that I was walking toward a precipice, but I went forward with a crown of joy upon my brow, with sentiments undreamed of by ordinary people. I have acted like those lovers who shut themselves up in a small house on the shores of a lake for a year or two, and agree to kill each other after living in an ocean of pleasure, dying thus in all the splendor of their illusions and their love. Such people have always seemed to me tremendously sensible. You knew nothing of my pleasures or my sacrifices. Is it not the greatest joy to conceal from one's beloved, the price of the thing she craves? I can confess these secrets to you now. I shall be far away when you hold in your hand this paper laden with love. If I lose the treasures of your gratitude, I do not feel that contraction of the heart that would seize me were I to speak to you of these matters. And then, my best beloved, is it not a shrewd device on my part to reveal the past to you thus? is it not a means of extending our love into the future? Do we need stimulants, pray? do we not love each other with a pure flame which cares naught for proofs, which knows naught of time nor distance,

but lives upon itself? Ah! Natalie, I just left the table by the fire at which I am writing, and went to look at you as you lay asleep, suspecting nothing, in the attitude of an innocent child, with your hand stretched out toward me. I dropped a tear upon the pillow that has been the confidant of our secret joys. I go away without fear, trusting in that attitude; I go to win repose by winning a fortune so great that our happiness may be undisturbed by anxiety, and that all your tastes may be gratified. Neither you nor I are capable of doing without the luxuries of the life we are leading. I am a man and I am brave; mine alone be the task of amassing the fortune that we need. Perhaps you would have followed me! I will conceal from you the name of the ship, the time and place of my departure. A friend will tell you all when it is too late. Natalie, my affection knows no bounds, I love you as a mother loves her child, as a lover loves his mistress, with the utmost unselfishness. Mine be the toil, thine the pleasure; mine the suffering, thine the happy life. Amuse yourself, retain all your luxurious habits, go to the Italiens, the Opéra, into society, to balls and routs, I give you absolution for everything. Dear angel, when you return to this nest, where we have feasted upon the fruits that have ripened during our five years of love, think of your dearest, think of me for a moment, go to sleep in my heart. That is all I ask of you. And I, my darling, everlasting thought, when, wandering beneath the burning sun, working for both of us, I

encounter obstacles to be overcome, or when, worn out by toil, I find rest in the hope of return, will think of you, my dearest life. Yes, I will try to live in you, I will say to myself that you have no anxiety or sorrow, that you are happy. Just as we have life by day and by night, waking and sleeping, so I shall have my joyous life at Paris and my life of toil in the Indies; a painful dream, a delicious reality; I shall live so happily in your reality, that my days will be dreams. I shall have my memories, I shall repeat line by line the lovely five years' poem, I shall remember the days when you enjoyed making yourself resplendently beautiful, and when, by a lovely toilette, or by a charming *déshabillé*, you acquired a new charm in my eyes. I shall taste again upon my lips the flavor of our banquets. Yes, dear angel, I go from you as a man embarked in an undertaking, which, if successful, will give him his beautiful mistress. The past will be to me like the dreams of desire which precede possession, and which possession often fails to realize, but which you have always more than realized. I shall return to find in you a new wife, for will not absence endow you with new charms? O my beautiful love, my Natalie, may I be a sacred thing to you! Be always the child I see sleeping yonder! If you should betray my blind confidence, Natalie, you must know that you would have no cause to fear my wrath; I should die without a word. But a woman does not deceive the man who leaves her free, for a woman is never a coward. She makes sport of a tyrant, but

treachery so easy to commit, and which would cause the death of its victim, she would have none of that. No, I will not think of it. Forgive that cry so natural for a man to utter. Dear angel, you will see De Marsay; he will be the lessee of our house and will let it to you. This pretended lease was necessary to avoid useless loss. The creditors, not knowing that payment in full is merely a question of time, might have seized the furniture and our life interest in the house. Be kind to De Marsay: I have the most absolute confidence in his capacity and his loyalty. Take him for your champion and adviser, make him your gentleman-in-waiting. Whatever his engagements, he will be always at your service. I have placed the settlement of my affairs in his hands. If he should advance any amount and should have need of it later, I rely upon you to return it to him. Remember that I do not leave you to De Marsay, but to yourself; by mentioning him to you I do not mean to inflict him upon you. Alas! it is impossible for me to talk to you of business, for I have but an hour to remain with you. I count your breathing, I try to divine your thoughts in your infrequent movements in your sleep, your breath revives the flower-strewn hours of our love. At your every heart-beat, my heart pours out its treasures upon you, I scatter upon you all the rose-leaves of my soul, as children strew them before the altar on Corpus-Christi. I commend to you the memories I heap upon you, I would I could infuse my blood into your veins that

you might be wholly mine, that your thoughts might be my thoughts, that your heart might be my heart, that I might be all in all to you. You made a little murmuring sound like a sweet response. Be always calm and beautiful as you are calm and beautiful at this moment. Ah! I would I possessed the fabulous power we read of in fairy tales; I would like to leave you asleep thus during my absence and awaken you with a kiss on my return. What a store of courage is necessary and how dearly I must love you to leave you as I see you thus! You are a devout Spaniard, you will respect an oath given while you sleep, and in which no one would doubt your unexpressed word. Adieu, my darling: your poor *Fleur des Pois* is carried off by a hurricane; but he will return to you forever on the wings of fortune. No, dear Ninie, I do not say adieu, for I will never leave you. Will you not be the soul of my acts? Will not the hope of bringing back to you an indestructible fortune give life to my enterprise, will it not guide my every step? Will you not be always by my side? No, it will not be the Indian sun, but the fire of your glance that will light my path. Be as happy as a woman can be without her lover. I would have liked not to take for my last kiss, a kiss in which you are only passive; but, my adored angel, my Ninie, I would not waken you. When you awake you will find a tear upon your forehead, make of it a talisman! Think, oh! think of him who will perhaps die for you, far away from you; think less of the

husband than of the devoted lover who leaves you in God's hands."

THE COMTESSE DE MANERVILLE'S REPLY TO HER HUSBAND.

"My dearest love, in what affliction your letter has plunged me! Had you the right, without consulting me, to resolve upon a step which strikes at the happiness of both of us alike? Are you free? do you not belong to me? am I not half Creole? might not I have gone with you? You show me that I am not indispensable to you. What have I done to you, Paul, to deprive me of my rights? What do you think will become of me, alone in Paris? Poor angel, you take all my sins upon yourself. Have I had no part in your ruin? has not my frippery helped to swell the balance? You have made me curse the happy, thoughtless life we led for four years. Isn't it enough to kill me to know that you are exiled for six years? Will you return? I had a happy inspiration when I refused with instinctive obstinacy to consent to the division of property you and my mother were so determined upon. What did I say to you then? Would it not bring you into disrepute? Would it not ruin your credit? You found it necessary to lose your temper before I would yield. My dear Paul, you have never been so great in my eyes as you are at this moment. Let nothing discourage you, go and seek your fortune!—no man who had not your character and

your strength could act thus. I am at your feet. A man who admits his weakness with such honesty as you, who sets out to make his fortune again for the same reason that led him to squander it, for love, for an irresistible passion, that man, O Paul, is sublime. Go without fear, surmount obstacles, without suspicion of your Natalie, for to doubt her would be to doubt yourself. Poor dear heart, you want to live in me? And I, shall not I be always in you? I shall not be here, but wherever you are. If your letter caused me keen sorrow, it also filled me with joy; you caused me to feel the two extremes of emotion in the same moment, for when I saw how dearly you loved me, I was proud to know that my love was fully appreciated. Sometimes I have thought that I love you more than you love me; now I confess that I am vanquished, and you can add that sweet advantage to all the advantages you now possess; but have I not more reason to love you? Your letter, that precious letter in which the soul reveals itself and which has shown me so plainly that everything is as it was between us, will lie upon my heart during your absence, for it contains all my life; that letter is my glory! I will go and stay at Lanstrac with my mother, and shall be as one dead to the world; I will save our income to pay your debts in full. From this morning, Paul, I am another woman, I say farewell forever to the world, I care for no pleasure which you do not share. In any case, Paul, I must leave Paris and live in solitude. Dear child,

remember that you have a twofold reason to make a fortune. If your courage needed a spur what could be more efficacious than that you should find still another heart in yourself. My dear love, do you not guess? we shall have a child. Your dearest hopes are fulfilled, monsieur. I didn't want to talk with you of those false joys that kill, we have already been disappointed too many times in that connection, and I didn't want to be compelled to contradict the good news. To-day I am certain of what I tell you, and happy to lighten your sorrow with a ray of joy. This morning, suspecting nothing, thinking that you had gone out for a short time, I went to the Assumption to give thanks to God. Could I foresee disaster? everything seemed to smile on me this morning. As I left the church, I met my mother; she had heard of your embarrassment, and had come to Paris by post with her little savings, thirty thousand francs, hoping to be able to arrange a settlement of your affairs. What a heart she has, Paul! I was overjoyed; I returned home to tell you the good news while we were breakfasting under the tent in our garden, where I had prepared the good things you like best. Augustine handed me your letter. A letter from you, when we had slept together—was there not a whole drama in the bare fact? A deadly shudder ran through me, and then I read!—I wept bitterly as I read, and my mother also burst into tears! Must one not love a man to weep for him, for tears make a woman ugly? I was half-dead. Such love and such courage!

such happiness and such misery! the richest fortunes of the heart, and momentary worldly ruin! to be unable to press your beloved to your heart when admiration of his grandeur holds you fast! what woman could have resisted such a storm of emotions? To know that you were far away when your hand upon my heart would have done me such a world of good; you were not here to give me the look I love so dearly, to rejoice with me at the realization of your hopes; and I was not by your side to allay your suffering by the caresses that render your Natalie so dear to you, and make you forget everything. I insisted upon leaving Paris, upon flying to your feet; but my mother reminded me that the *Belle-Amélie* was to sail the next day; that the post alone could make the journey in time, and that, in my present state, it would be downright madness to risk a life upon a jolt. Although already a mother, I demanded horses; my mother deceived me by letting me think they would be brought. And she acted wisely, for the first effects of pregnancy have begun to manifest themselves. I could not endure such violent emotion, and I was taken ill. I am writing to you in bed, and the doctors insist upon rest during the first few months. Hitherto, I have been a frivolous wife; now I am going to be a model mother. Providence is very kind to me, for a child to nurse and care for and educate, can alleviate as nothing else can do the grief your absence will cause me. I shall have in him another you, whom I will worship. I will boldly

avow my love, which we have so carefully concealed. I will tell you the truth. My mother has already found an opportunity to contradict some slanderous rumors about you that were flying around. The two Vandenesses, Charles and Félix, have taken up your cause valiantly; but your friend De Marsay treats it all as a joke; he laughs at your accusers instead of replying to them; I don't like that way of repelling serious attacks with jests. Aren't you mistaken in him? However, I will obey you and will make him my friend. Have no fear, my adored, as to matters that concern your honor. Is it not mine? My diamonds will be pawned. My mother and I are going to use all our resources to pay your debts in full and we shall try to buy back your estate of Bellerose. My mother, who understands business like a steward, blames you severely for not making a clean breast to her. She wouldn't have purchased—she did so only to give you pleasure—the Grainrouge estate which was all surrounded by your property, and then she could have loaned you a hundred and thirty thousand francs. She is in despair at the step you have taken. She fears the effect of life in India upon you. She begs you to be sober, and not to allow yourself to be led astray by the women. I laughed at that. I am as sure of you as of myself. You will return to me rich and faithful. No one but myself in the whole world knows your woman's delicacy and your inmost sentiments, which make you, as it were, a delicious human flower worthy of

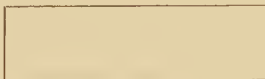
Heaven. The people of Bordeaux were quite right to give you your pretty sobriquet. But who will care for my delicate flower? My heart is torn by horrible thoughts. That I, his wife, his Natalie, should be here, when perhaps he is already suffering! And I, who am so closely bound to you, am not to share your pain, your vexations and your perils! In whom will you trust? How can you do without the ear into which you have whispered everything? Dear sensitive plant, carried off from me by a tempest, why are you transplanted from the only soil in which you could develop your perfume? It seems to me that I have been alone two centuries; I am cold, too, here in Paris. I have already wept bitterly—

“To be the cause of your ruin! what a text for the thoughts of a loving wife! You have treated me like a child to whom everything he wants is given, like a courtesan for whom a spendthrift runs through his fortune. Oh! your pretended delicacy was an insult. Do you think I couldn’t have done without fine dresses, and balls, and the Opéra, and social success? Am I a mere coquette? Do you think I have no power of serious thought, that I cannot serve your material interests as well as I have served your pleasure? If you were not far away, miserable and unhappy, you would be well scolded, monsieur, for such impertinence. To undervalue your wife to that extent! My God! why did I go into society to flatter your vanity; I wore fine clothes for you, and you know it. If I had done

wrong I should be severely punished; your absence is a bitter expiation of our life together. That joy was too perfect; it had to be paid for by some great sorrow, and it has come! After that happiness so carefully hidden from the inquisitive gaze of the world, after that constant holiday interspersed with the secret follies of our love, nothing else is possible but solitude. Solitude, dear heart, nourishes great passions, and I long for it. What should I do in society? to whom should I boast of my triumphs? Oh! to live at Lanstrac, the estate laid out by your father, in a château which you renovated so magnificently, to live there with your child, waiting for you, and sending you every night and every morning, the prayers of the mother and the child, of the wife and the angel—will that not be an approach to happiness? Do you see these little hands clasped in mine? Do you remember, as I shall remember every night, the ecstasies of which you spoke in your dear letter? Ah! yes, we love each other with an equal love. That sweet certainty is a talisman against misfortune. I suspect you no more than you suspect me. What can I write here to console you—I who am desolate and broken-hearted, who see these six years stretching out before me like a desert to be crossed? No, I am not the more unhappy; will not the desert be enlivened by our little son? yes, I will give you a son,—I must, must I not? Well, my dearest love, adieu, our hopes and our love will go with you everywhere. The tears that fall upon this paper

will tell you many things that I cannot express.
Take the kisses that are imprinted on the little
square below by

“YOUR NATALIE.”



Upon reading this letter Paul fell into a reverie, caused as much by the intoxicating effect of these protestations of love, as by the premeditated evocation of its joys; and he weighed them one by one in order to explain his wife's condition to his satisfaction. The happier a man is the more he trembles. In hearts whose one characteristic is their tenderness—and tender-heartedness suggests a little weakness—jealousy and anxiety are in direct proportion to happiness and its measure. Strong hearts are neither jealous nor fearful; jealousy is suspicion, fear shows a small mind. Unlimited faith is the great man's principal attribute: if he is deceived, strength no less than weakness may make a man a dupe; in that case his contempt serves him as an axe, and he hews a path through everything. Such grandeur is exceptional. To whom does it not sometimes happen to be abandoned by the spirit that sustains our frail human machine, and to listen to the unknown power that denies everything? Paul, clinging to some undeniable facts, believed and doubted in the same moment.

Lost in his thoughts, a prey to harrowing uncertainty, involuntary in its inception and combated by the pledges of pure affection and by his faith in Natalie, he read this diffuse letter twice over, and was unable to reach any conclusion for or against his wife. Love is as great in prolixity as in conciseness.

In order to understand the situation in which Paul was soon to find himself, we must imagine him floating upon the ocean as he was floating upon the vast expanse of his past, looking back upon his whole life as upon a cloudless sky and finally reverting, after passing through the whirlwind of doubt, to the pure, perfect, unalloyed faith of the believer, of the Christian, of the lover reassured by the voice of his heart.

And first of all, it is essential to reproduce here the letter to which Henri de Marsay replied.

LETTER FROM COMTE PAUL DE MANERVILLE TO
MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS HENRI DE MARSAY.

“Henri, I am going to say to you the grandest words a man can say to his friend: I am ruined. When you read these lines, I shall be ready to sail from Bordeaux for Calcutta, on the ship *Belle-Amélie*. You will find at your notary’s a document which only awaits your signature to be complete, whereby I lease my house to you for six years by a fictitious lease: you will execute a sub-lease to my wife. I

am obliged to take this precaution, so that Natalie may be able to remain there without fear of being ejected. I also assign to you the income of my *majorat* for four years, all to secure the sum of a hundred and fifty thousand francs which I beg you to send me in the form of a bill of exchange upon some Bordeaux house, to Mathias's order. My wife will give you her guaranty in addition to my income. If the usufruct of the *majorat* should pay you more rapidly than I expect, we will have an accounting at my return. The sum I ask you to send me is indispensable to enable me to go and try my luck; and, if I know you, I shall receive it at Bordeaux, without needless words, the day before I sail. I have acted as you would have acted in my place. I have held out to the last moment without allowing my ruin to be suspected. Then, when the report of the sale on execution of my available real estate reached Paris, I raised money on my notes of hand for a hundred thousand francs, in order to try gambling. A stroke of luck might set me up again. I lost. How have I ruined myself? With my eyes open, my dear Henri. From the first day I saw that I could not keep on at the pace I was going, I knew the inevitable result, and I determined to close my eyes, for it was impossible for me to say to my wife: 'Let us leave Paris and go and live at Lanstrac.' I ruined myself for her as men ruin themselves for their mistresses, but without doubt as to the result. Between ourselves, I am neither an idiot nor a weak

man. An idiot does not allow himself to be governed by a passion with his eyes open; and a man who goes to the Indies to make his fortune over again, instead of blowing his brains out, has courage. I will return rich or not at all. But, my dear friend, as I have no wish for fortune except for her, as I wish to be nobody's dupe, as I shall be absent six years, I entrust my wife to you. You have adventures enough of your own to respect Natalie, and to give me the benefit of all the honest feeling that binds us together. I know no better guardian than you. I leave my wife childless, and a lover would be very dangerous to her. Understand, my dear Marsay, I love Natalie madly, servilely, without shame. I would forgive her being unfaithful to me, I think, not because I am certain of being able to avenge myself, for I might die of it! but because I would kill myself to leave her happy, if I could not make her happy myself. What can I fear? Natalie has for me the true friendship which, although distinct from love, acts as a preservative of love. She has been treated by me like a spoiled child. I experienced so much pleasure in my sacrifices, one led so naturally to another, that she would be a monster if she deceived me. Love deserves love—Alas! would you like to know all, my dear Henri? I have just written her a letter in which I allow her to think that I go away with hope in my heart, with a serene countenance, that I have neither doubt nor jealousy nor fear—such a letter as a son writes who wishes to conceal from his mother

the fact that he is going to his death. My God! De Marsay, I had hell in my heart, I am the most wretched man on earth! The shrieks and the gnashing of teeth are all for you! I confess to you the tears of the desperate lover; I would rather sweep the streets under her windows for six years than return a millionaire after six years absence, if that were possible. I am in frightful agony, I shall go on from one torment to another until you have written me a word to say that you accept a mission which no one in the world but you can fulfil and accomplish. O my dear De Marsay, that woman is indispensable to my life, she is my air and my sun! Take her under your protecting arm, keep her true to me, even if it should be against her will. Yes, I would still be happy with half-happiness. Be her chaperon, I shall have no distrust of you. Prove to her that it would be commonplace to betray me; that she would be like all other women, and that it would show true spirit to remain faithful to me. She should still have means enough to continue her luxurious, untroubled life; but, if she should lack anything, if she should have a caprice, be her banker, have no fear, I will return rich. After all, my terrors are causeless, of course; Natalie is an angel of virtue. When Félix de Vandenesse, who fell deeply in love with her, began to pay her rather marked attention, I simply had to point out the danger to Natalie; she at once thanked me so affectionately that I was moved to tears. She told me that it would not be well for her reputation that a

man should leave her house abruptly, but that she would find a way to dismiss him; she received him very coldly after that, and everything turned out for the best. We have had no other subject of contention in four years, if indeed you can call a pleasant talk between friends contention. Well, my dear Henri, I bid you adieu like a man. The catastrophe came. Whatever its cause, it is here; I have taken off my coat. Poverty and Natalie are two irreconcilable terms. However, my assets and my liabilities will very nearly balance, so no one can complain of me; but, if anything unforeseen should imperil my honor, I rely upon you. If any event, if anything of serious importance should happen, you can write me under cover to the Governor-General at Calcutta; I have friends in his household, and someone there will take charge of any letters that come for me from Europe. Dear friend, I hope to find you the same on my return: the man who can make sport of everything, and who, nevertheless, is quick to respond to another's feelings when they are in accord with his own noble sentiments. You remain at Paris! While you are reading these lines, my cry will be: 'To Carthage!'

MARQUIS HENRI DE MARSAY'S REPLY TO COMTE
PAUL DE MANERVILLE.

"So you have gone to the bottom, Monsieur le Comte! Monsieur l'Ambassadeur has foundered!

Fine things these are you are doing! Why did you hide your plight from me, Paul? If you had said a single word to me, my poor dear boy, I would have enlightened you as to your position. Your wife has refused to give me her guaranty. May that single fact remove the scales from your eyes! If that is not enough, let me tell you farther that your notes of hand were protested at the request of one Lécuyer, formerly chief clerk to one Solonet, a notary at Bordeaux. This embryo usurer, who came from Gascogne to engage in pettifogging here, is the agent of your highly-esteemed mother-in-law, the real creditor for the hundred thousand francs for which the good woman, so they say, advanced you seventy thousand. Compared to Madame Evangélista, Papa Gobseck is a flannel rag, a piece of velvet, a soothing potion, a vanilla meringue, an indulgent uncle. Your Bellerose property will fall into the clutches of your wife, to whom her mother will give the difference between the upset price and the amount of her claims. Madame Evangélista will have Guadet and Grassol, and the mortgages on your house at Bordeaux belong to her, under the names of men of straw Solonet hunted up for her. Thus these two worthy creatures will get together a hundred and twenty thousand francs a year, which is the amount of the income from your estates, added to thirty odd thousand francs from investments in the funds which the little cats possess. Your wife's guaranty was of no use to me. The aforesaid Sieur Lécuyer came to me this

morning and offered to repay the sum I loaned, if I would assign my claim to him in due form. The crop of 1825, which your mother-in-law has in the Lanstrac cellars, is sufficient to pay me. So those women must have calculated upon your being already at sea; but I am sending this letter by a courier, so that you may still be in time to follow the advice I am going to give you. I got this Lécuyer to talk. I picked up from his lies, from what he said and what he didn't say, the threads that I lacked to reconstruct the entire framework of the domestic conspiracy concocted against you. This evening at the Spanish embassy, I will offer my admiring compliments to your mother-in-law and your wife. I will pay court to Madame Evangélista, I will abandon you in a dastardly way, I will say adroitly insulting things about you, for if I were outspoken, my purpose would be too soon detected by that sublime Mascarillon in petticoats. How did you set her against you? That's what I want to know. If you had had the wit to fall in love with that woman before marrying her daughter, you would be a peer of France to-day, Duc de Manerville and Ambassador at Madrid. If you had sent for me at the time of your marriage, I would have helped you to study and analyze the two women to whom you were pledging yourself; and from our common observations, some useful counsel might have come. Wasn't I the only one of your friends in a position to respect your wife? Was I to be feared? After passing judgment on me, those two

women were afraid of me and kept us apart. If you hadn't made wry faces at me like a fool, they wouldn't have devoured you. Your wife helped on our coolness nobly; she was taught, as a bird is taught to sing, by her mother, to whom she wrote twice a week, and you never paid any attention to it. I recognized my Paul in that detail when I heard it. Within a month, I shall be near enough to your mother-in-law to learn from her the secret of the Hispano-Italian hatred she seems to have vowed against you, the kindest-hearted man on earth. Did she hate you before her daughter fell in love with Félix de Vandenesse? or does she drive you off to India so that her daughter may be as free as a woman is in France when she and her husband are living apart and their property is divided? There is the problem. I see you roaring and tearing your hair when you learn that your wife loves Félix de Vandenesse to distraction. If I hadn't taken a fancy to take a journey in the East with Montriveau, Ronquerolles, and some other good fellows of your acquaintance, I might have been able to tell you something about that intrigue which began while I was away; I saw the seeds of your disaster putting forth shoots even then. But what gentleman so depraved as I am, could approach such questions without an opening? Who would dare vilify a woman? Who would shatter the mirror of illusions in which one of our friends delights to watch the fairy-like creations of a happy marriage? Are not illusions the heart's riches? Was not your

wife, my dear friend, a woman of fashion in the widest acceptation of the term? She thought of nothing but her triumphs and her dresses; she went to the Bouffons and the Opéra, and to balls; she rose late and drove in the Bois; dined out or gave a dinner-party herself. That sort of life seems to be to women what war is to men; the public sees only the victors, it forgets the dead. If refined women die at the trade, those who can endure the strain must have organizations of iron, consequently little heart and excellent stomachs. Therein lies the explanation of the heartlessness and indifference of the salon. Estimable people remain at home, weak and yielding natures succumb, and only the pebbles are left, who keep the social ocean from overflowing its boundaries, allowing themselves to be rubbed and worn smooth by the waves, and yet not worn out. Your wife stood the strain of that life admirably, she seemed accustomed to it, she always looked fresh and beautiful; it was a simple matter for me to draw my conclusions; she didn't love you, and you loved her like a madman. To force love to gush out from that slaty nature, a man of iron was necessary. After he had undergone the shock of a liaison with Lady Dudley, my own father's wife, and had survived it, Félix was the man for Natalie. There was no great merit in detecting the fact that you were indifferent to your wife. From indifference of that sort to dislike was but a step; and, sooner or later, a discussion, a word, an act of authority, a mere nothing might bring it to the

surface. I could have told you the scene that took place every evening in her bedroom between you two. You have no child, my dear. Doesn't that fact account for many things to a shrewd observer? In love as you were, you would hardly notice the coldness natural to a young woman whom you made ready just in the nick of time for Félix de Vandenesse. Even if you had thought your wife cold, the stupid code that governs married men would have led you to credit her coldness to her innocence. Like all husbands, you thought you could keep her virtuous in a society where the women explain to one another in whispers what the men dare not say, where everything that a husband doesn't tell his wife is selected for discussion, commented on laughingly, banteringly, behind the fan, apropos of a lawsuit or an intrigue. If your wife loved the social advantages of marriage, she found its burdens a little heavy. The chief burden, the impost, was yourself! Seeing none of these things, you went on digging pits and covering them over with flowers, according to the deathless rhetorical phrase; you mildly obeyed the law that governs the majority of men, against which I tried to protect you. My dear boy, the only thing lacking to make you as big a fool as the bourgeois deceived by his wife, who is surprised or terrified or angry because of it, was that you should talk to me about your sacrifices, your love for Natalie, and come and sing in my ear: 'She would be very ungrateful if she should betray me: I did this and I did that, I will do better, I will

go to the Indies,'—etc., etc. My dear Paul, in God's name, have you lived in Paris, have you the honor of being bound by ties of friendship to Henri de Marsay, only to be ignorant of the commonest things, the first principles of action of the female mechanism, the alphabet of a woman's heart? Exterminate yourself; go to Sainte-Pélagie for a wife, kill twenty-two men, abandon seven girls, serve Laban, cross the desert, sail very near the galleys, cover yourself with glory, cover yourself with shame, refuse like Nelson to fight in order to go and kiss Lady Hamilton's shoulder, like Bonaparte whip old Wurmser, have your head split open on the Bridge of Arcola, go mad like Roland, break a leg that's in splints for the sake of waltzing six minutes with a woman!—My dear man, what have those things to do with love? If love is to be judged by such specimens, man would be too happy: a few deeds of valor, performed in a moment of passion, would give him the woman he loves. Love, my old Paul, is faith like that in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin: that comes or it doesn't come. Of what use are oceans of blood poured out, or the mines of Potosi, or glory, to give birth to an involuntary, inexplicable sentiment? Young men like you, who want to be loved according to the balance of the account, seem to me to be low-minded usurers. Our lawful wives owe us children and virtue, but they don't owe us love. Love, Paul, is the consciousness of pleasure given and received, the certainty of giving it and receiving

it; love is a longing, constantly shifting, always satisfied and yet insatiable. The day when Vandenesse touched the chord of desire in your wife's heart, the chord that you left untouched, she ceased even to remember your amorous flourishes, your torrents of talk and cash. Your rose-strewn conjugal nights—all smoke! your devotion—food for remorse! your person—a victim to murder at the altar! your past life—darkness! a thrill of love banished your treasures of passion which were thenceforth naught but old iron. He, Félix, had all the fascinations, all the devotion, gratis perhaps, but in love, belief is equivalent to reality. Your mother-in-law naturally took the lover's part against the husband; secretly or openly, she closed her eyes, or opened them—I don't know what she did, but she was for her daughter against you. In the fifteen years that I have been making a study of society, I have never known a mother to abandon her daughter under such circumstances. This indulgence is an inheritance transmitted in the female line. What man can rebuke them for it? what interpreter of the Civil Code, who sees legal formulas where only sentiments exist? The extravagance which was forced upon you by the life of a woman of fashion, the natural downward inclination of a yielding nature, and your own vanity, perhaps, afforded them the means of getting rid of you by a cleverly concerted catastrophe. From all this, my dear friend, you will conclude that the mission with which you entrusted me, and which I should have

executed with the greater glory because it would have amused me, is null and void. The evil to be prevented is accomplished, *consummatum est*. Forgive me, my friend, for writing to you à la De Mar-say, as you would say, concerning matters that must seem to you of serious importance. Far be it from me to think of cutting capers on a friend's tomb as heirs do upon their kinsman's. But you wrote me that you had become a man, I believe you, and I treat you as a politician and not as a lover. In your eyes, this disaster is a good deal like the brand on the shoulder that induces a convict to enter upon a life of systematic opposition and take up arms against society—isn't it so? At all events, you are relieved of one cause of anxiety: marriage did possess you, now you possess marriage. Paul, I am your friend in every sense of the word. If your brain had been enclosed in a brazen skull, if you had exhibited the energy that has come to you too late, I would have proved my friendship for you by telling you things that would have made you trample upon mankind as upon a carpet. But when we talked about the system to which I owed my faculty of finding entertainment with a few friends in the bosom of Parisian civilization, like a bull in a china-shop; when I told you in romantic guise the true story of my youthful adventures, you took them to be romances in fact, and failed to see their bearing. So I could not look upon you in any other way than as an unhappy passion. But, upon my honor as a man, under the present circumstances,

you are playing a noble part, and you have lost none of your credit with me as you might think. If I admire great rascals, I esteem and love men who have been deceived. Apropos of that doctor who came to such a bad end, brought to the scaffold by his love for a mistress, I told you the much more attractive story of the poor lawyer who is living now in some convict prison or other, branded for forgery, and who would have given his wife—she was an adored wife too!—thirty thousand francs a year; but his wife gave him up to the police, in order to be rid of him, so that she might go and live with a nobleman. You, and some other idiots who were taking supper with us, held up your hands in horror. Well, my dear boy, you are the lawyer, minus the prison. Your friends don't forgive you for the loss of consideration, which, in our social circle, is equivalent to a decree of the Court of Assizes. The sister of the two Vandenesses, the Marquise de Listomère and her whole coterie in which little Rastignac has enlisted,—a rascal who is just beginning to cut a figure; Madame d'Aiglemont and her salon, where Charles de Vandenesse is king; the Lenoncourts, Comtesse Féraud, Madame d'Espard, the Nucingens, the Spanish embassy, in short, a whole social clique, incited thereto with great adroitness, are pouring out vile accusations upon you. You are a ne'er-do-well, a gambler, a rake who has run through his fortune like a booby. After paying your debts several times over, your wife—an angel of virtue!—has just taken up your

notes for a hundred thousand francs, although she is living upon her separate property. Fortunately, you have done yourself credit by disappearing. If you had kept on, you would have brought her to the gutter, she would have been the victim of her wifely devotion. When a man comes into power, he has all the virtues of an epitaph; let him come to want, and he has more vices than the Prodigal Son ever had: you could never imagine how many sins, à la Don Juan, society lays at your door. You speculated on the Bourse, you had licentious tastes, the gratification of which cost you enormous sums, and whose description requires commentaries and jocose remarks that make women dream. You paid frightful rates of interest to usurers. The two Vandenesses tell laughingly how Gigonnet sold you an ivory frigate for six thousand francs, and bought it back from your valet for a hundred crowns in order to sell it to you again; and how you solemnly demolished it when you found that you could buy a genuine brig for the money it cost you. The incident happened to Maxime de Trailles nine years ago, but it fits you so well that Maxime has lost the command of his frigate forever. But I can't tell you everything, for you furnish a whole cyclopædia of anecdotes which the ladies are interested in exaggerating. In such a state of affairs, do not the most prudish creatures justify the consolation offered by Félix de Vandenesse?—his father died yesterday, by the way! Your wife has won a most prodigious triumph. Yesterday Madame de Camps

undertook to repeat all these fine things to me at the Italiens. 'Don't talk to me,' I replied; 'you people don't know anything about it! Paul has robbed the Bank and cozened the royal Treasury. He murdered Ezzelin, put to death three Medoras on Rue Saint-Denis, and I believe he's interested—I tell you this between ourselves—in the order of the Ten-Thousand. His go-between is the illustrious Jacques Collin, whom the police have never been able to lay hands upon since he escaped from the galleys. Paul gave him lodgings in his house. You see, he is capable of anything; he hoodwinks the government. They have started off together to ply their trade in the Indies, and rob the Great Mogul.' La de Camps realized that such a distinguished person as she is ought not to transform her lovely lips into the jaws of a Venetian bronze. Many people, when they hear these tragi-comic tales, refuse to believe them; they take the part of human nature and its worthy sentiments, and they insist that it's all fiction. My dear boy, Talleyrand uttered this admirable epigram: *Everything happens!* Certainly, more astonishing things than this domestic conspiracy are taking place under our eyes; but society has so much interest in contradicting them, in declaring that it is slandered; and then these magnificent dramas are played so naturally, with such a gloss of good taste, that I often find it necessary to wipe the glass of my lorgnette so that I can see to the bottom of things. But, I say again, when a man is a friend of mine, when

we have received the baptism of champagne together and partaken of communion together at the altar of Venus Commodus, when we have both been confirmed by the hooked fingers of Play, and my friend gets into a false position, I would crush twenty families to set him right. You must see plainly enough from this that I love you; have I ever, to your knowledge, written so long a letter as this? Therefore, read carefully what I still have to say.

“Alas! Paul, I must indeed devote myself to writing, I ought to accustom myself to make drafts of despatches: I approach the subject of politics. I intend, five years hence, to have a minister’s portfolio, or some embassy where I can stir up public affairs as the spirit moves me. There comes a time of life when the loveliest mistress a man can serve is his country. I take my place in the ranks of those who would overturn the present system as well as the present ministry. In short, I am sailing in the waters of a certain prince, who is crippled only in the foot, and whom I consider a politician of genius, whose name will be great in history: a prince as perfect as a great artist can be. There are Ronquerolles, Montriveau, the Grandlieus, Roche-Hugon, Sérizy, Féraud, Granville and myself, all allied against the priest party, as the party of donkeys represented by the *Constitutionnel* ingeniously calls it. We propose to overturn the two Vandenesses, the Ducs de Lenoncourt, De Navarreins, De Langeais, and the Grand-Almonry. In order to assure our triumph, we

shall go so far as to join forces with La Fayette, the Orléanists and the Left, all to be thrown overboard the day after the victory, for any sort of government is impossible with their principles. We are capable of anything for the country's welfare and our own. Personal questions in connection with the king are to-day sentimental nonsense, and we must sweep the political field clear of them. In that respect the English, with their sort of doge, are farther advanced than we are. Politics has got beyond that, my dear fellow. The true policy now is to give the nation a new start by creating an oligarchy, in which there is a definite theory of government, and which will guide public affairs in a direct course, instead of allowing the country to be pulled and hauled in a thousand different directions, as we have been for fifty years past in this fair land of France, so intelligent and so stupid, so wise and so foolish, which stands in need of a proper system rather than of men. What are individuals in this great question? If the purpose aimed at is a noble one, if the masses live more happily and without anxiety, what do they care for the profits of our stewardship, our fortunes, our privileges and our pleasures? I am now standing on a firm foundation. I have a hundred and fifty thousand a year in the three per cents, and a reserve fund of two hundred thousand francs to provide against losses. That seems to me a small matter in the pocket of a man starting off with his left foot to carry the government by escalade. A

lucky accident led to my entering upon this career, which attracted me but little; for you know how fond I am of the life of an Oriental. After sleeping thirty-five years, my highly-respected mother awoke and remembered that she had a son who was a credit to her. Often, when one tears up a vine by the roots, shoots peep out of the ground years after; even so, my friend, although my mother had almost torn me out of her heart by the roots, I sprang up again in her head. At fifty-eight she considers that she is old enough to think of no other man than her son. In this frame of mind she met, at some warm springs or other, a charming English old maid, with an income of two hundred and forty thousand francs, and, like a good mother, she aroused in her bosom the audacious ambition to become my wife. A damsel of thirty-six, God save the mark! reared on the strictest Puritan principles, a genuine brood-hen who maintains that adulterous women ought to be burned on the public square! 'Where would they get the wood?' I asked her. I would have sent her to all the devils, for two hundred and forty thousand francs a year aren't the equivalent of my liberty, my physical or moral value, or my future. But she is the sole and only heir of a gouty old brewer in London, who, within a reasonably short time, ought to leave her a fortune at least equal to that of which the little darling is already possessed. In addition to these recommendations, she has a red nose, eyes like a dead goat's, and a figure that makes me fear she

would break in three pieces if she should fall; she looks like a badly painted doll; but she is charmingly economical; she will adore her husband through thick and thin; she has the English genius; she will look after my mansion, my stables, my house, my estates for me better than any intendant. She has all the dignity of virtue; she stands as straight as a confidential friend at the Théâtre-Français; nothing would destroy my impression that she has been impaled and the pale has broken off in her body. Miss Stevens's complexion is fair enough not to make marriage with her altogether too disagreeable in case it should be absolutely necessary. But—and this is where I draw the line!—she has the hands of a maiden as virtuous as the blessed Ark; they are so red that I haven't yet devised a method of whitening them without too much outlay, and I don't know what to do about tapering down her fingers, which look like rollers. Oh! she evidently belongs to the brewer by her hands and to the aristocracy by her cash; but she apes the manners of the great a little too much, like all rich Englishwomen who try to pass themselves off for ladies, and aren't careful enough to hide their lobster-claws. She has, however, as little intelligence as I like in a woman. If there exists a more consummate fool, I would take the road to hunt her up. This damsel, whose name is Dinah, will never pass judgment on my actions, she will never contradict me; I shall be her Upper Chamber, her Lords, her Commons. In short, Paul, she is an irrefutable

proof of the English genius; she is a product of English mechanical skill brought to its last degree of perfection; she certainly was built at Manchester, between Perry's quill-factory and the place where they make steamboats. She eats, she drinks, she walks, she can produce children, look after them, educate them to admiration, and play the woman so as to make one believe that she is one. When my mother introduced us, she had mounted the machine so carefully, looked over the bolts and oiled the mechanism so thoroughly, that nothing squeaked; and when she saw that I didn't make too wry a face, she let go the last spring and the creature spoke! My mother also had the last word. Miss Dinah Stevens spends only thirty thousand francs a year, and has been traveling from motives of economy for seven years. Thus there is a second hoard, and in cash. Matters have gone so far that the banns have been published. We have got to *My dear love*. Miss makes faces at me that would knock over a porter. The arrangements are made; nothing is said about my fortune, but Miss Stevens sets aside a portion of hers to establish a *majorat* in realty with an income of two hundred and forty thousand francs and to purchase a house to go with it; the stipulated *dot*, for which I shall be responsible, is a million. She has no reason to complain, for I leave her her uncle intact. The good brewer—who has contributed to the *majorat*, by the way—nearly burst with joy when he heard that his niece was to be a marchioness. He is quite

capable of making a sacrifice for my first-born. I shall withdraw my fortune from the public funds as soon as they touch eighty, and invest everything in land. Two years hence I should have four hundred thousand a year income from my real estate. Once the brewer is in his bier, I can count upon six hundred thousand a year. You see, Paul, I give my friends no advice that I don't follow myself. If you had listened to me, you would have an English wife, some nabob's daughter who would leave you free to lead the life of a bachelor, and the necessary liberty to play the game of ambition. I would turn my future wife over to you if you weren't married. But that isn't the case. I am not the man to make you eat your past all over again. This preamble was necessary to explain to you that I shall have the means to lead the life that must be led by those who would play the great game of politics. I won't fail you, my friend. Instead of going to pickle yourself in the Indies, it is much simpler to sail in company with me on the waters of the Seine. Believe me, Paris is still the land from which fortune gushes forth in most copious streams. Potosi is located on Rue Vivienne or Rue de la Paix, Place Vendôme or Rue de Rivoli. In every other country, material works, the sweat of your brow, marches and countermarches are necessary accompaniments to the building of a fortune, but here thought alone is sufficient. Here every man, though he be only moderately clever, spies a gold mine when he is putting on his slippers, picking his teeth after dinner,

going to bed or getting up. Find me a place in the world where a bright idea, yes, or a stupid one, brings in more or is understood more quickly, than here. If I reach the top of the ladder, do you suppose I am the man to refuse you a grasp of the hand, a word, or a signature? Don't we young rakes need a friend on whom we can rely, even if for no other purpose than to compromise him in our stead and place, or to send him off to die as a simple soldier in order to save the general? Politics is an impossible profession without a man of honor with whom one can discuss everything and do everything. This, then, is my advice to you. Let the *Belle-Amélie* sail without you, return to Paris like a thunderbolt; I will arrange a duel for you with Félix de Vandenesse, in which you shall fire first and bring our man down for me like a pigeon. In France, the outraged husband who kills his rival becomes thereby a respectable and respected man. No one laughs at him. Fear, my dear boy, is an element in social life, a means of success for those who don't lower their eyes beneath anybody's stare. I, who worry as little about living as about drinking a glass of asses' milk, and who have never felt the emotion of fear, have noticed, my dear fellow, the strange effects produced by that emotion upon our modern manners. Some tremble at the thought of losing the pleasures they have become attached to, others at the thought of leaving a woman. The dare-devil customs of the old days, when men threw away life like an old shoe, no longer exist! The

courage of many men is simply a clever estimate of their adversary's cowardice. The Poles are the only Europeans who fight for the pleasure of fighting, they still cultivate the art for the art's sake and not as a speculation. Kill Vandenesse, and your wife will tremble, and your mother-in-law will tremble, and the public will tremble, and you rehabilitate yourself, and you make public your insane passion for your wife, and people believe you, and you become a hero. Such is France! I won't stop at a hundred thousand francs with you; you will pay your principal debts; you will stop your ruin where it is by selling your property with right of redemption, for you will soon be in a position to reimburse your creditors before their claims mature. Then, as you are enlightened, once for all, as to your wife's character, you will control her by a word. While you loved her, you could not contend against her; but having ceased to love her, you will have irresistible power over her. I shall have made your mother-in-law as supple as a glove; for we must see that you again enjoy the hundred and fifty thousand francs a year those women have helped themselves to. So give up your idea of expatriation, which seems to me like the chafing-dish of charcoal for men who have brains. What's running away but letting slander win the fight? The gambler who goes to get more money and returns to the game, loses everything. One must have his gold in his pocket. You make me think of going to India for fresh troops. It's a bad business! We are two

gamblers on the great green cloth of politics; between us a loan is all right. So take post-horses, come back to Paris and begin the game anew; you will win with Henri de Marsay for your partner, for Henri de Marsay knows what to aim at and how to strike. This is where we stand. My father belongs to the English ministry. We shall have connections in Spain through the *Evangelistas*; for as soon as your mother-in-law and I have measured our claws, we shall see that there's nothing to be gained when it's devil against devil. Montriveau, my boy, is a lieutenant-general; he will certainly be Minister of War some day, for his eloquence gives him great influence in the Chamber. Ronquerolles is already Secretary of State and in the Privy Council. Martial de la Roche-Hugon is appointed minister to Germany and made a peer of France; he brings us as his dowry the *Maréchal Duc de Carigliano* and the whole rump of the Empire which has fatuously welded itself to the backbone of the Restoration. Sérizy leads the Council of State and is indispensable there. Granville holds the magistracy to which his two sons belong; the *Grandlieus* are in the best odor at court; Féraud is the soul of the *Gondreville coterie*, low schemers who are always on top, God knows why. Thus supported, what have we to fear? We have a foot in every capital, an eye in every cabinet, and we envelop the administration without a suspicion on its part. Isn't the question of money a trifle, a mere nothing in this great, carefully adjusted mechanism?

Above all, what is one woman? will you still continue to act like a student? What is life, my dear man, when a woman monopolizes it? a galley which one hasn't under control, which obeys an erratic, but not magnetless compass, which is tossed about by contrary winds and in which man is a veritable galley-slave, who carries out not only the law of the land but also that improvised by the convict-keeper, without possibility of revenge. Pah! I can understand that, through passion, or for the pleasure one feels in transmitting his strength through a pair of white hands, one might obey a woman; but obey Médor?—in that case, I shatter Angélique. The great secret of social alchemy, my dear fellow, is to make the most we can out of each of the ages through which we pass, to have all its leaves in the spring, all its blossoms in the summer, all its fruits in the autumn. A few boon companions and myself have amused ourselves for a dozen years past, like the gray, red and black musketeers, denying ourselves nothing, not even a filibustering enterprise now and then; now we are going to set about shaking down the ripe plums at an age when experience has gilded the harvest. Come with us and you shall have your part in the *pudding* we propose to cook. Come, and you will find a devoted friend in the skin of

“HENRI DE M.”

When Paul de Manerville came to the end of this letter, whose every word was like the blow of a

hammer to the edifice of his hopes, his illusions, his love, he was in the neighborhood of the Azores. Amid the ruins of his life, he fell into a cold, helpless rage.

“What have I done to them?” he said to himself.

That question is characteristic of fools, of weak creatures, who lacking the power to see, can foresee nothing.

“Henri! Henri! faithful friend!” he cried.

Many men would have gone mad. Paul went to bed and slept the deep sleep that follows great disaster—the sleep that seized upon Napoléon after Waterloo.

Paris, September–October, 1835.

LA GRENADIÈRE

TO D. W.

LA GRENADIÈRE

*

La Grenadière is a small residence on the right bank of the Loire, about a mile below the Bridge of Tours. At that point the river, broad as a lake, is studded with green islands and flows at the foot of a cliff upon whose summit are several country-houses, all built of white stone and surrounded by vineyards and gardens with a southern exposure, where the most delicious fruits of the earth grow in abundance. Terraced by the patient labor of several generations, the recesses in the cliff reflect the sun's rays and make it possible to raise in the open air, by virtue of a quasi-artificial temperature, the products of the hottest climates. In one of the shallower depressions which vary the slope of this hillside rises the pointed spire of Saint-Cyr, a small village to which all these scattered houses belong. A little farther on, the Choisille flows down into the Loire through a rich valley which breaks the continuity of the cliff. La Grenadière, lying half-way up the slope, within a hundred paces of the church, is one of those venerable structures, two or three hundred years old, which one encounters in Touraine in every

pleasant situation. A fissure in the rock has facilitated the construction of a staircase which leads down by easy stages to the *levée*, a name given in the province to the embankment constructed at the foot of the hill to confine the Loire to its bed, along which runs the high road from Paris to Nantes. At the top of the staircase is a gate, and beyond the gate a narrow, stony path, laid out between two terraces,—breastworks, so to speak, embellished with vine-clad arbors and fruit trees, and intended to prevent the caving-in of the earth. This path, built at the base of the upper terrace, and almost hidden by the trees upon the lower, leads to the house by a sharp ascent, affording a view of the river increasing in extent with every step. This secluded thoroughfare ends at a second gate, in the Gothic style, with an arched top, and with some simple decorations in a bad state of preservation, covered with wild gilliflowers, ivy, wall-creepers and moss. Those indestructible plants adorn the backing of all the terraces, emerging from the clefts in the stonework, and forming new designs in bright-hued flowers as the seasons follow one another.

As you pass through this worm-eaten gate, a tiny garden wrested from the cliff by still another, and last terrace, whose old black balustrade overlooks all the others, presents to view its patch of turf embellished with a few green trees and a multitude of rose-bushes and flowers. Opposite the gate, at the other end of the garden, is a wooden summer-house resting upon the wall near by, its posts hidden by

jasmine, honeysuckle, grape-vine and clematis. In the centre of this last garden stands the house, at the top of a vine-covered flight of steps, with an archway beneath, from which you enter an enormous cellar hollowed out of the rock. The building is surrounded by vines, and *grenadiers* raised in the open air, from which latter the estate takes its name. The façade is composed of two wide windows separated by a low rustic door, and of three attics in a mansard roof of enormous height compared to the low stud of the ground floor. This roof, which has two gables, is covered with slate. The walls of the main building are painted yellow, and the door, the shutters below and the blinds in the attics are green.

Upon entering you find yourself in a small hall from which a winding staircase ascends, its style changing at every turn; the wood of which it is built is almost rotted away; the spiral rail is smooth and dark from long use. At the right is a large dining-room with antique wainscoting, and square floor tiles made at Château-Regnault; at the left, a salon of the same dimensions, without wainscoting, but hung with deep yellow paper with a green border. Neither of the two rooms has a plastered ceiling; the timbers overhead are of walnut and the interstices filled with a white mortar made with cow-hair. On the first floor, there are two large rooms with whitewashed walls; the stone mantels are less richly carved than those on the ground floor. All the windows open to the south. On the northern side there is a single door, cut in the wall behind

the staircase, opening upon the vineyards. At the left, adjoining the house, is a frame structure, protected from the rain and sun by slates which make long blue lines, perpendicular or oblique, upon the wall. The kitchen, which is located in this sort of cottage, communicates with the house inside, but it has also a private entrance of its own a few steps from the ground; at the foot of the steps is a deep well surmounted by a rustic pump, surrounded by savins, aquatic plants and tall grass. This structure of recent date proves that La Grenadière was formerly nothing more than a grape-farm. The owners came there from the city, from which it is separated by the broad bed of the Loire, to harvest the grapes, or on pleasure-parties. They would send their eatables thither in the morning, and hardly ever sleep there except at harvest time. But the English swooped down upon Touraine like a cloud of locusts, and La Grenadière had to be completed to be let to them. Luckily this modern appendage is hidden from sight behind the first of a row of lindens set out in a ravine at the foot of the vineyard; the latter, which is about two acres in extent, rises above the house and completely overtops it, the incline being so steep that it is very hard to climb. There is a space of little more than five feet between the house and the green, vine-clad hill—a sort of ditch filled with vigorous vegetation into which the rich loam from the vineyard falls in rainy weather, helping to enrich the soil of the gardens supported by the balustraded terrace. The house of the farmer

employed to look after the vineyard is attached to the western gable; it is covered with thatch, and forms, in a way, a pendant to the kitchen. The property is surrounded by walls and rows of trees; the vineyard is planted with fruit trees of every sort; in fact, not an inch of this valuable soil is lost to cultivation. If man neglects an arid corner of the cliff, nature drops a fig-tree there or a few wild flowers, or wild strawberries sheltered by the rocks.

Nowhere else in the world could you find a dwelling at once so modest and so grand, so rich in fruits and flowers, in sweet perfumes, and in lovely views. It is, as it were, a miniature Touraine in the heart of the greater Touraine, where all the flowers, all the fruits, all the beauties of that province are adequately represented. There are the grapes of every country, figs, peaches, pears of all sorts, and melons in the open field, to say nothing of the licorice-plant, the Spanish genista, the rose-laurel of Italy, and the jasmine of the Azores. The Loire is at your feet. You overlook it from a terrace a hundred and eighty feet above its capricious waters; at night you breathe its breezes fresh from the sea and laden with perfume on the way by the flowers along the *levées*. An errant cloud that changes shape and hue at every foot of space it traverses, imparts, under a perfectly blue sky, innumerable ever-changing aspects to each detail of the sublime landscape that lies spread out before you, wherever you may take your stand. From this spot the eye at first embraces the left bank of the Loire from Amboise;

the fertile plain from which Tours rises with its suburbs, its factories and Plessis; then, another part of the left bank, which, from Vouvray to Saint-Symphorien, describes a semicircle between cliffs laden with joyous vineyards. The view is bounded by the rich hillsides of the Cher, a bluish horizon broken by parks and châteaux. Lastly, toward the west, the mind loses itself on the great stream, where at all hours vessels pass up and down, their white sails bellied out by the fresh winds that almost always prevail in the immense basin. A prince might take La Grenadière for his villa, but certainly some poet will always make his home there; there lovers will find sweet retirement, and it is the abode of a worthy bourgeois of Tours; it has poetic suggestions for all imaginations, for the most humble and the coldest, as well as for the loftiest and the most impassioned, no one can remain there without being conscious of the atmosphere of happiness, without realizing the full meaning of a tranquil life, devoid of ambition and of care. Reverie is in the air and in the murmuring of the waves; the sands speak, they are sad or gay, golden or dull; all is life and movement about the owner of this vineyard, who stands unmoved amid its bright flowers and its appetizing fruits.

An Englishman pays a thousand francs for the privilege of occupying this humble dwelling for six months of the year; but he agrees to keep his hands off the crop: if he desires the fruit he pays double rent; if the wine appeals to him he doubles

the amount again. What, pray, is the value of La Grenadière, with its staircase in the cliff, its hidden path, its threefold terrace, its two acres of vineyard, its balustrades of blooming rose bushes, its old stone stoop, its pump, its unkempt clematis and its trees from every clime? Make no offer! La Grenadière will never be for sale. Purchased in 1690, and regretfully parted with at that time for forty thousand francs, like a favorite horse abandoned by the Arab of the desert, it has ever since remained in the same family, their pride, their patrimonial jewel, their Regent.

“Is not to see, the same thing as to have?” a poet has said. From here you can see three valleys of Touraine and its cathedral suspended in the air like filigree-work. Can one pay for such treasures? Can you ever pay for the health you will recover there, under the lindens?

In the spring of one of the most flourishing years of the Restoration, a lady, accompanied by a nurse and two children, the younger of whom seemed to be about eight years old and the other about thirteen, came to Tours to look for a dwelling-place there. She saw La Grenadière and hired it. Perhaps its distance from the city influenced her to take up her abode there. The salon was transformed into a bedroom for herself, she placed each child in one of the rooms on the first floor, and the nurse slept in a little closet over the kitchen. The dining-room became the living-room and reception-room of the little family. The house was furnished very simply, but

with taste; there was nothing useless and nothing that smacked of luxury. The furniture selected by the stranger was of walnut, without ornamentation of any sort. The perfect cleanliness that prevailed, and the harmony between the exterior and interior of the house, comprised its whole charm.

It was a difficult matter to ascertain whether Madame Willemsens—the name assumed by the stranger—belonged to the wealthy bourgeoisie, the nobility, or certain equivocal species of the female kind. Her simplicity furnished material for the most contradictory suppositions, but her manners tended to confirm those which were favorable to her. And so, within a short time after her arrival at Saint-Cyr, her reserved conduct excited the interest of the idlers who are accustomed, in the provinces, to watch for anything that seems likely to enliven the narrow sphere in which they live.

Madame Willemsens was a woman rather above middle height, slender and thin, but gracefully proportioned. She had pretty feet, more remarkable for the well-turned ankle than for the narrowness of the foot itself, a vulgar recommendation; and hands which seemed lovely beneath her gloves. Her white skin, once fresh and ruddy, was mottled by dark-red blotches here and there. Premature wrinkles marred her noble brow, crowned by lovely chestnut hair, firmly planted and always arranged in two circular coils, a maidenish arrangement that was most becoming to her melancholy features. Her black eyes, surrounded with dark rings, deep-set,

glowing with feverish brilliancy, affected a deceitful tranquillity; and, at times, if she chanced to forget the expression she made it her duty to assume, signs of secret suffering could be detected therein. Her oval face was a little long; but it may be that in other days happiness and good health had maintained its proper proportions. An unnatural smile, remarkable for its expression of gentle sadness, habitually played about her pale lips; but her face lighted up and her smile expressed the joy of motherhood when the two children, who were always at her side, were looking into her face or asking her one of the inexhaustible store of idle questions, all of which have a meaning for a mother. Her walk was slow and stately. She clung to the same costume with a persistency that indicated a formal determination to think no more of her toilette, and to forget the world, by which she wished no doubt to be forgotten. She wore a very long black dress with a belt of watered silk ribbon, and over her shoulders a fichu of lawn with a broad hem, the two ends of which were secured carelessly in her belt. Her shoes were selected with a degree of care that indicated habits of refinement, and she wore gray silk stockings which completed the suggestion of mourning conveyed by this conventional garb. Her hat, which was of English shape and always the same, was made of gray material and adorned with a black veil.

She seemed to be extremely weak and quite ill. The only walk she ever indulged in was from La

Grenadière to the Bridge of Tours; there she would go on pleasant evenings with her two children to breathe the fresh air of the Loire and enjoy the effects produced by the setting sun upon a landscape as extensive as that of the Bay of Naples or the Lake of Geneva. During her sojourn at La Grenadière she went but twice to Tours: the object of the first visit was to request the principal of the college there to direct her to the best masters in Latin, mathematics and drawing; of the second, to arrange with the persons recommended to her, the price of their lessons, or the hours at which lessons should be given the children. But it was enough for her to show herself once or twice a week on the bridge, to arouse the curiosity of almost all the inhabitants of the city, whose favorite promenade it is.

However, notwithstanding the sort of innocent espionage to which idleness and the restless curiosity of the upper classes in the provinces give rise, no one succeeded in obtaining reliable information as to the rank the stranger held in society, nor as to her fortune or her real position in life. But the owner of La Grenadière told some of his friends the name,—her real name, doubtless,—under which the stranger had taken her lease. She called herself Augusta Willemsens, Comtesse de Brandon. This of course was her husband's name. At a later date the concluding incidents of this narrative confirmed the accuracy of this disclosure; but it was not made public beyond the circle of small tradesmen frequented by the landlord.

Thus Madame Willemsens remained a profound mystery to the best society of Tours, and the utmost they were able to discover about her was that she had a distinguished bearing, simple and delightfully natural manners, and a voice of angelic sweetness. Her utter loneliness, her melancholy and her beauty so pertinaciously obscured—half-disfigured even—had so much that was fascinating, that several young men fell in love with her; but the more sincere their love, the less bold it was; and then she was so imposing, it was hard to venture to address her. Indeed, if some daring spirits did write to her, their letters were undoubtedly burned unopened. Madame Willemsens threw all the letters she received into the fire, as if she had determined that her stay in Touraine should be free from any sort of annoyance. She seemed to have come to this enchanting retreat to give herself up entirely to the joy of living. The three teachers who were admitted at La Grenadière spoke with respectful admiration of the touching picture presented by the close and unclouded affection between the children and their mother.

The children excited an equal amount of interest, and mothers could not look at them without a feeling of envy. Both resembled Madame Willemsens, who was their own mother. They both had the transparent skin, the bright coloring, the pure, liquid eyes, the long lashes, the well-rounded outlines which impart such fascination to the beauties of childhood. The elder, Louis-Gaston by name,

had black hair and a fearless expression. Everything about him denoted robust health, as his broad, high, beautifully arched forehead, seemed to indicate an energetic character. He was quick and deft in his movements, of large build, unaffected and graceful, manifested surprise at nothing, and seemed to reflect upon everything he saw. The other, named Marie-Gaston, was almost fair, although some locks of hair were already beginning to take the color of his mother's. Marie had the frail figure, the delicate features, the grace of manner, which were so charming in Madame Willemsens. He seemed sickly; his gray eyes had a sweet, soft expression, his cheeks were pale. There was something of the woman in him. His mother still kept him in the embroidered collar, the long curls and the little jacket with frogs and olives which impart an indescribable charm to a young boy, and betray the truly feminine pleasure in dress, wherein the mother indulges herself, perhaps, no less than the child. This pretty costume was in striking contrast to the older boy's simple jacket, with his shirt collar turned over it. The breeches, the shoes, the color of the clothes were all similar and disclosed their relationship, as did their resemblance in feature. It was impossible for anyone who saw them not to be touched by Louis's thoughtful care of Marie. The older boy's expression was quite paternal as he looked at his junior; and Marie, despite the natural heedlessness of his age, seemed deeply grateful to Louis: they were two small flowers, hardly separated from

the parent stem, shaken by the same breeze, warmed by the same sunbeam, one brilliantly colored, the other of soberer hue. A word, a look, the sound of their mother's voice, sufficed to attract their attention, to make them turn their heads, listen to a request, a command, a word of advice, and to obey. Madame Willemsens could always make them understand her wishes, her will, as if their thoughts were shared in common. When they went for their evening walk, as the children were busily playing in front of her, plucking a flower or examining an insect, she would gaze at them with such profound emotion, that the most indifferent passer-by would be touched, would pause to look at the children, smile at them, and salute the mother with a friendly glance. Who could have failed to admire the exquisite neatness of their clothing, the sweet tones of their voices, their graceful motions, their happy faces, and the instinctively noble bearing which told of the careful education they had received from the cradle? The children seemed never to have cried nor wept. Their mother had something like a magnetic prevision of their desires, their sufferings, constantly anticipating and soothing them. She seemed to dread a complaint from them more than her own everlasting damnation. Everything about the children was a eulogy of their mother; and the picture of their threefold life, which seemed but a single life, gave birth to vague, alluring fancies, the image of the bliss we dream of tasting in a better world.

The interior existence of these three beings who harmonized so perfectly with each other was in accord with the ideas suggested by their appearance: it was the orderly, regular, simple life suited to the education of children. Both rose an hour after day-break, and first of all repeated a short prayer, a custom of their childhood,—true words, repeated for seven years upon their mother's bed, begun and ended by a kiss. Then the two brothers, accustomed from their birth to the careful attention to the body, which is so essential to bodily health, and to the purity of the mind, and which affords a consciousness of well-being, so to speak, made their toilette with as scrupulous care as any pretty girl could do. They omitted nothing, for they both dreaded a word of reproach, however gently it might be uttered by their mother; as if, for instance, upon kissing them at the breakfast-table, she should say: "My dear angels, how have you succeeded in getting your nails so black already?" After dressing they would go down to the garden together, and shake off the impressions of the night in the dew and the fresh morning air, until the nurse had prepared the living-room, where they studied their lessons until their mother arose. But they were always on the alert for her waking, although they were not to enter her chamber until a certain time. This morning irruption, always made in contravention of the original agreement, was always a joyous season for them and for Madame Willemsens. Marie would leap upon the bed and throw his arms about

his idol, while Louis, kneeling at her pillow, held his mother's hand. Then there were anxious questions like those a lover asks his mistress, followed by angelic laughter, caresses passionate and pure at once, eloquent pauses, lisping childish stories interrupted again and again by kisses, rarely finished, but always listened to.

"Have you been working hard?" the mother would ask in a gentle, affectionate tone, ready to look pityingly upon sloth as a misfortune, ready to bestow a glance wet with tears upon the one who was content with his own conduct.

She knew that her children were actuated by the desire to please her; they knew that their mother lived only for them, guided their steps with all the intelligence of love, and gave them all her thoughts, all her hours. A marvelous instinct, which is neither selfishness nor reasoning, which is, perhaps, the faculty of emotion in its primitive purity, teaches children whether they are or are not the objects of exclusive care, whether that care is bestowed upon them gladly. Do you love them dearly? the dear creatures, all frankness and justice, are wonderfully grateful. They love passionately, jealously, have the sweetest ways, can find the most affectionate words to say; they are trustful, they believe in you implicitly. And so we may, perhaps, say that there are no bad children without bad mothers; for the affection they feel is always proportioned to that they have experienced, to the early treatment they have received, to the

first words they have heard, the first glances to which they have looked for love and life. Everything becomes an attraction, therefore, or everything is repulsion. God places a child at its mother's breast to make her understand that it should remain there for a long time. But there are mothers cruelly misunderstood, tender and sublime affections constantly wounded; frightful ingratitude, which proves how difficult it is to establish absolute rules in respect of sentiment. In this mother's heart and in her sons' hearts, none of the numberless bonds were lacking that should attach them to one another. Alone upon earth, they lived the same life and understood each other perfectly. When Madame Willemsens was silent in the morning, Louis and Marie also held their peace, respecting everything of hers, even the thoughts they did not share. But the elder, endowed with an intelligence already well developed, was never content with the assurances of good health his mother gave him; he would study her face with anxious foreboding, ignorant of the danger, but feeling a presentiment of evil when he saw a violet tinge about her dark-ringed eyes, when he saw that they were more sunken than ever and the red spots on her face more inflamed. Overflowing with true sensibility, he could guess when Marie's play began to tire her, and he would then say to his brother:

"Come, Marie, let's go to breakfast; I'm hungry."

But, when he reached the door he would turn to catch the expression on his mother's face, which

always wore a smile for him; and often tears came to her eyes when her child's gestures or expression revealed an exquisite delicacy of feeling, a premature comprehension of sorrow.

The time set apart for her children's first breakfast and their recreation was employed by Madame Willemsens in dressing; for she was something of a coquette for her dear little ones, she was anxious to please them, to gratify them in every way, to be a charming object for them to look upon, to be as attractive to them as a sweet perfume to which one constantly returns. She was always ready for the recitations, which took place from ten o'clock till three, but were interrupted at noon by a second breakfast eaten in common under the summer-house in the garden. After this meal, an hour was given up to play while the happy mother, the unhappy woman, lay stretched upon a long divan in the summer-house, whence she could see lovely, ever-changing Touraine, ever rejuvenated by the innumerable accidents of the hour, the season and the weather. Her children would trot about through the vineyard, climbing the terraces, running after lizards, themselves as swift and agile as the lizard; they would gaze wonderingly at the grain and flowers, study the insects, and run to their mother to ask an explanation of everything. There were perpetual goings and comings to the summer-house. In the country the children needed no toys, everything afforded them employment.

Madame Willemsens was present at their lessons,

embroidery frame in hand. She remained silent, looked neither at the teachers nor the children; she listened attentively as if to try and catch the meaning of the words and to discover, in a general way, if Louis was making progress: if he puzzled his master with a question and thus suggested a step forward on his own part, then the mother's eyes would light up, she would smile and flash a glance at him, instinct with hope. She demanded little of Marie. Her ambition was for the elder, for whom she manifested a sort of respect, employing all her tact as a woman and a mother to elevate his mind and give him a lofty idea of himself. This conduct concealed a secret thought which the child should understand some day, and which he did understand. After each lesson she went with the masters to the outer door and asked for a conscientious opinion as to Louis' studies. She was so affectionate and engaging that they told her the truth, to assist her to turn Louis's attention to the points upon which he seemed to be weakest. Dinner came in due course; then play and the evening walk; after their return, the lessons for the following day were learned.

Such was their life, uniform but well occupied, wherein work and diversion happily mingled, left no room for ennui. Discouragement and quarrels were impossible. The mother's boundless love made everything easy. She had sown discretion in her sons by refusing them nothing, courage by praising them at the proper time, resignation by letting them see Necessity in all its forms; she had

developed and fortified their angelic natures with the untiring care of a fairy. Sometimes tears glistened in her glowing eyes when, as she watched them at play, she reflected that they had never caused her the slightest sorrow. Unbounded, perfect happiness makes us weep thus only because it is an image of the heavenly of which we all have confused ideas. She passed delicious hours lying upon her rustic couch, enjoying a lovely day, a vast expanse of water, a picturesque landscape, listening to her children's voices, their ringing laugh born of laughter itself, and their little disputes in which their close affection, Louis's fatherly feeling for Marie and the love of both for her, but shone the brighter.

As they had both had in their earlier years an English nurse, they spoke French and English equally well; so their mother used the two languages alternately in conversation. She guided their young minds with admirable judgment, allowing no false idea to make its way into their understandings, no evil principle into their hearts. She governed them by gentleness, concealing nothing from them, explaining everything to them. When Louis wanted to read, she took pains to give him books that were reliable as well as interesting. The lives of famous seamen, the biographies of great men, of illustrious captains,—in the most trifling details of books of this sort, she found endless opportunities to explain to him prematurely the world and life; emphasizing particularly the means

by which obscure, but really great men had made their way, by their own merits, from the lowest ranks of society to the attainment of noble destinies. These lessons, which were not the least useful, were taught in the evening when little Marie was sleeping on his mother's knees,—in the silent, lovely evening when the skies were reflected in the waters of the Loire; but they always heightened this admirable woman's tendency to melancholy, and she would finally cease to speak and sit pensively in her chair, with her eyes full of tears.

"Why are you crying, mother?" Louis asked her one lovely evening in June as the bright sunshine of a hot day was giving place to the half-tints of a mellow twilight.

"My son," she replied, putting her arm around his neck and drawing him to her, for his repressed emotion touched her deeply, "I am crying because the wretched fate of Jameray Duval, a helpless parvenu, is the fate I have prepared for you and your brother. Soon, my dear child, you will be alone on earth, with no one to lean upon, no one to protect you. I shall leave you still young, and I would have liked to see you strong enough and far enough advanced in your studies to act as a guide to Marie. But I shall not have time. I love you too dearly not to be made very unhappy by these thoughts. Dear children, if only you don't curse me some day—"

"Why should I curse you some day, mother dear?"

"Some day, little one," she said, kissing him on the forehead, "you will find out that I have done wrong by you. I shall leave you, in this place, without means, without—"

She hesitated.

"Without a father," she continued.

At that word she burst into tears, and gently pushed away her son, who, by a sort of intuition, realized that his mother wished to be alone, and carried Marie away, half-asleep. An hour later, when his brother was in bed, Louis returned stealthily to the summer-house where his mother was. He heard these words spoken by a voice dear to his heart:

"Come, Louis!"

The child threw himself into his mother's arms, and they kissed each other, almost convulsively.

"Darling," he said at last, for he often gave her that name, finding even the words of filial love too weak to express his feelings; "darling, why are you afraid of dying?"

"I am ill, my poor dear angel; every day my strength lessens, and my disease is past cure; I know that."

"What is your disease?"

"I must forget it; and you must never know the cause of my death."

The child was silent for a moment, glancing askance at his mother, who, with her eyes fixed upon the sky, was watching the clouds. Moment of sweet melancholy! Louis did not believe in his

mother's approaching death, but he felt its pangs without being conscious of them. He respected her long reverie. Had he been a little older, he would have read upon her sublime features some thoughts of repentance mingled with happy memories—the whole life of a woman: a careless childhood, an unloving marriage, a terrible passion, flowers born in a storm and struck down by the lightning flash into an abyss from which naught ever returns.

“Dearest mother,” said Louis at last, “why do you hide your suffering from me?”

“My son,” she replied, “we must bury our sorrows away from strangers’ eyes, and show them a smiling face; never speak to them of ourselves, nor concern ourselves about them; those maxims, followed in the family life, are one of the sources of happiness. You will have to suffer bitterly some day! When that day comes, remember your poor mother, who died in your presence, smiling upon you to the last, and hid her suffering from you; then you will have courage to support the hardships of life.”

Thereupon, swallowing her tears, she tried to make clear to her son the mechanism of life, the meaning and value and uncertainty of worldly fortunes, the social relations, the honorable methods of obtaining the wealth essential to the needs of life, and the necessity of education. Then she told him that one of the reasons of her constant sadness was that, when she died, he and Marie would be almost destitute, having but a trifling sum between them and no protector but God.

"How I must hurry and learn!" cried the child, gazing at his mother long and piteously.

"Ah! how happy I am," said she, covering her son with kisses and tears. "He understands me!—Louis," she added, "you will be your brother's teacher, won't you? you promise me? You are no longer a child!"

"Yes," he replied; "but you won't die yet, will you?"

"Poor little fellows," said she, "my love for you keeps me up! And then this country is so lovely and the air here does one so much good, perhaps—"

"You make me love Touraine, even more than I used to," said the child, deeply moved.

From the day when Madame Willemsens, foreseeing her approaching death, spoke thus to her older son of her impending doom, Louis, who had completed his fourteenth year, became less absent-minded, more studious, less disposed to play than before. He must have succeeded too in persuading Marie to read instead of devoting his time to noisy sports, for the two children made much less noise about the paths and gardens and terraces of La Grenadière. They made their life conform to their mother's melancholy humor, as her face grew paler from day to day, beginning to assume a yellow tinge, as her brow sank at the temples and her wrinkles became deeper with each succeeding day.

In August, five months after the arrival of the little family at La Grenadière, everything had changed. Remarking the symptoms, as yet not

very pronounced, of the slow degeneration that was undermining the constitution of her mistress, who was kept alive only by her courageous heart and her excessive love for her children, the old nurse became sad and gloomy; she seemed to share the secret of this expected death. Often when her mistress, still lovely and more coquettish than she had ever been, arrayed her wasted body, rubbed rouge upon her cheeks and walked upon the upper terrace, accompanied by her children, old Annette would poke her head between the two savins by the pump, forget the work she had begun, hold her linen in her hand, and struggle to keep back the tears as she looked upon a Madame Willemsens so little like the fascinating woman she had known.

The pretty little house, at first so joyous and animated, seemed to have become sad; it was silent as the grave, its occupants rarely went out, for Madame Willemsens could no longer walk as far as the Bridge of Tours without a tremendous effort. Louis, whose imagination had suddenly developed, and who had identified himself, so to speak, with his mother, having divined her fatigue and pain through her rouge, constantly invented excuses for not taking a walk that had become too long for her. The happy couples who in those days visited Saint-Cyr, —the miniature Courtille of Tours,—and the groups of promenaders would see in the evening, above the *levée*, the pale, thin woman, in mourning garb, half-consumed by disease, but still brilliantly beautiful, flitting like a phantom along the terraces. Great

suffering makes itself felt. So it was that the household at the vineyard became very silent. Sometimes the peasant, his wife and his two children would be sitting in a group at the kitchen door, Annette washing at the well, and madame and her sons in the summer-house, and yet not the slightest sound could be heard in the blooming gardens; and, although Madame Willemsens was not conscious of it, the eyes of all were fixed upon her in deep sadness. She was so kind and thoughtful, so imposing a figure to those who approached her! As for herself, from the beginning of the autumn, which is so bright and beautiful in Touraine, and whose beneficent influence, to say nothing of the grapes and delicious fruit, seemed likely to prolong the mother's life beyond the term fixed by the ravages of an unknown disease, she had no eyes for aught save her children, and made the most of each hour with them, as if it had been the last.

From June till the end of September, Louis worked at night without his mother's knowledge, and made tremendous progress; he had reached equations of the second degree in algebra, had learned elementary geometry and drew wonderfully well; in fact, he could have passed with credit the examination provided for young men wishing to enter the *Ecole Polytechnique*. Sometimes in the evening, he went for a walk upon the Bridge of Tours, where he fell in with a lieutenant in the navy, retired on half-pay; the manly features, the bearing, the decoration of this seaman of the Empire, made a deep

impression upon his imagination. The seaman, on his side, conceived a friendly feeling for a youth whose eyes sparkled with energy. Louis, eager to listen to tales of war, and curious for information, came often to lounge in his sailor friend's wake for the purpose of talking with him. The half-pay lieutenant had a close friend and comrade, an infantry colonel banished from the active list like himself; thus young Louis had an opportunity to learn of life in camp and life on board ship. He overwhelmed the two veterans with questions. After he had, in anticipation, shared their misfortunes and their rough life, he asked his mother's permission to travel about in the neighborhood for amusement. As his teachers, amazed that such was the fact, had been telling Madame Willemsens that her son was working too hard, she received his request with infinite delight. The child thereupon made tremendously long excursions. Wishing to accustom himself to fatigue, he climbed the highest trees with extraordinary agility; he learned to swim; he sat up late at night. He was not the same child,—he was a young man whose face was burned a healthy brown by the sun and already wore an expression of profound thoughtfulness.

The month of October came; Madame Willemsens could not leave her bed until noon, when the sun's rays, reflected by the waters of the Loire and concentrated upon the terraces, produced at La Grenadière a temperature similar to that of the warm balmy days at the Bay of Naples, which lead

physicians to recommend it as a place of abode. She would then take her seat under one of the green trees, and her sons would stay close by her side. The studies were at an end, the teachers dismissed. The children and the mother wished to live, thenceforward, heart to heart, without outside cares or distractions. There were no more tears or joyous prattle. The elder, lying on the grass beside his mother, would look up at her like a lover and kiss her feet. Marie, more restless, would run about plucking flowers for her, bring them to her with a sad face, and stand on tiptoe to take from her lips a kiss as sweet as a young girl's. This pale, wan woman, with the great black eyes, crushed by disease, slow in her movements, never complaining, smiling at her two vivacious children blooming with health, made a sublime picture which lacked neither the melancholy pomp of autumn with its withered leaves and trees half-bare, nor the mellow radiance of the sun and the fleecy clouds of the Touraine sky.

At last, Madame Willemsens was condemned by a physician to keep her room. Her room was adorned every day with the flowers she loved, and her children lived there. In the early days of November, she touched the piano for the last time. There was a Swiss landscape above the piano. Her children stood by the window, their heads so close together that they could hardly be distinguished. Her eyes wandered from her children to the landscape, from the landscape to her children. Her face

flushed, her fingers ran passionately over the ivory keys. It was her last fête, an unconscious fête, celebrated in the depths of her heart by the genius of memory. The doctor came and ordered her to keep her bed. This ominous sentence was received by the mother and the two sons in almost stupefied silence.

When the doctor had gone, she said:

"Louis, take me out upon the terrace, so that I may see my country once more."

At these words, spoken in a quiet tone, the child gave his mother his arm and led her out to the centre of the terrace. There her eyes wandered, involuntarily perhaps, to the sky rather than the earth; but it would have been difficult to decide at that moment where the loveliest picture was to be seen, for the clouds were gathered in masses bearing a vague resemblance to the most majestic glaciers of the Alps. Her brow contracted violently, her eyes assumed an expression of grief and remorse, she seized her son's hands and held them against her wildly-beating heart.

"*Father and mother unknown!*" she cried, gazing fixedly at them. "Poor angels! what will become of you? when you are twenty years old how sternly you will call upon me for a reckoning of your life and my own!"

She pushed them away, placed her elbows on the balustrade, hid her face in her hands, and stood thus for a moment, alone with herself, afraid to let her face be seen. When she roused herself from her

sorrow, she found Louis and Marie kneeling at her side like two angels; they were watching eagerly for her to look at them, and both smiled softly when her eyes met theirs.

"Could I but carry that smile with me!" she said, wiping away her tears.

She returned to the house and took to her bed, not to leave it again until she was laid in her coffin.

Eight days passed, eight days, each of which was like the last. Old Annette and Louis took turns at passing the night with Madame Willemsens, their eyes fixed upon the invalid's. Every hour was enacted the profoundly tragic drama which takes place in every family when there is a haunting fear that each stertorous breath the beloved invalid draws may be the last. On the fifth day of that fatal week, the doctor banished flowers from the room. The illusions of life departed one by one.

After that, Marie and his brother felt fire beneath their lips when they kissed their mother's brow. At last, on Saturday evening, Madame Willemsens could not endure the slightest sound, and it was necessary to leave her chamber in confusion. This untidiness was like the beginning of the death agony to the refined, order-loving woman. Louis would not leave his mother's side. During Sunday night, amid the most profound silence, Louis, who supposed that his mother was dozing, saw, by the light of a night-lamp, the bed-curtain put aside by a moist, white hand.

"My son!" said she.

There was something so solemn in the dying woman's accent, coming as it did from an intensely agitated heart, that it startled the child beyond measure, and he felt a throbbing heat in the marrow of his bones.

"What is it, mother?"

"Listen. To-morrow, it will all be over. We shall see each other no more. To-morrow you will be a man, my child. I am compelled, therefore, to make some arrangements which must be kept secret between us. Take the key of my little table. Good. Open the drawer. You will find at the left, two sealed papers. On one is the word: LOUIS; on the other: MARIE."

"Here they are, mother."

"They are your certificates of birth, my darling boy; they will be very essential to you. You will give them to my poor old Annette to keep, and she will return them to you when you need them. Now," she continued, "isn't there a paper in the same place on which I have written a few lines?"

"Yes, mother."

He began to read;

" 'Marie Willemsens, born at—' "

"Enough!" she said, hastily. "Don't go on. When I am dead, my son, you will hand that paper also to Annette, and tell her to leave it at the mayor's office at Saint-Cyr, where it will be of assistance in preparing an accurate certificate of my death. Find what you need to write a letter I will dictate to you."

When she saw that her son was ready and had turned toward her as if to listen, she said in a calm voice:

"Monsieur le Comte, your wife, Lady Brandon, has died at Saint-Cyr, near Tours, Department of Indre-et-Loire. She forgave you—"

"Sign—"

She paused, hesitating, excited.

"Are you feeling worse?" Louis asked.

"Sign: *Louis-Gaston!*"

She sighed, then continued:

"Seal the letter, and address it thus: *To Lord Brandon, Brandon Square, Hyde Park, London, England.*—Good," she continued. "On the day of my death, you will mail this letter at Tours.—Now," she said, after a pause, "take the little portfolio you know, and come here by me, my dear child.—There are twelve thousand francs there," she continued, when Louis had resumed his place. "They are yours. Alas! you would have been richer if your father—"

"My father!" cried the boy, "where is he?"

"Dead," she said, putting a finger on his lips, "dead, to save my honor and my life."

She raised her eyes to Heaven. She would have wept if she had had tears to weep.

"Louis," she continued, "swear to me, here, upon this pillow, to forget what you have written and what I have told you."

"Yes, mother."

"Kiss me, dear angel."

She was silent for some time as if to gather courage from God and to measure her words by her remaining strength.

"Listen. These twelve thousand francs are your whole fortune; you must keep them upon you, because, when I am dead, officers of the law will come and put seals upon everything here. Nothing will belong to you, not even your mother! And you will have nowhere to go, poor orphans! God knows where you will go. I have provided for Annette's future. She will receive a hundred crowns every year, and will remain at Tours, no doubt. But what will you do with your brother and yourself?"

She sat up in bed and looked at the fearless child, who stood beside her pillow, with sweat-bedewed forehead, pale with emotion, his eyes half-veiled by tears.

"Mother," he replied in a deep voice, "I have thought about it. I shall take Marie to the college at Tours. I shall give old Annette ten thousand francs and tell her to put them away safely and look after my brother. Then with the hundred louis I have left, I shall go to Brest, and ship as an apprentice. While Marie is in college, I shall work up to a lieutenancy. So, die in peace, mother: I will return rich, I will send the little one to the Ecole Polytechnique and direct his studies there according to his tastes."

A gleam of joy shone in the half-glazed eyes of the mother, two tears stole forth and rolled down

her burning cheeks; then a heavy sigh escaped from her lips, and she was near dying from the paroxysm of joy with which she found the father's heart born again in that of her son, suddenly transformed into a man.

"Angel from Heaven," said she, weeping, "with a word you have wiped away all my sorrow. Ah! I can suffer now.—He is my son," she continued; "it was I who made this man and reared him!"

She raised her hands in the air and clasped them as if to express a joy that knew no bounds; then she lay down again.

"Mother, how pale you are!" cried the child.

"You must go and find a priest," she replied, in a dying voice.

Louis woke old Annette, who ran off to the vicarage at Saint-Cyr in dire dismay.

In the morning, Madame Willemsens received the sacraments amid the most touching surroundings. Her children, Annette and the peasant's household, simple folk who had become like members of the family, were kneeling. The silver cross, borne by a humble village choir-boy, was held aloft by the bedside, and an old priest administered the viaticum to the dying mother. The viaticum! sublime word, conception even more sublime than the word, which only the apostolic religion of the Roman Church possesses.

"This woman has suffered terribly!" said the curé in his simple language.

Madame Willemsens could hear nothing, but her

eyes were fixed upon her children. Both of them listened in terror, amid the profound silence, to the dying woman's respiration, which was already growing weaker and weaker. At intervals, a deep sigh, indicating the struggle within, showed that life was not yet extinct. At last the mother's breathing ceased. Everybody burst into tears except Marie. The poor child was still too young to understand death. Annette and the farmer's wife closed the eyes of the adorable creature, whose beauty shone forth in all its pristine splendor. They sent everybody from the room, removed all the furniture, wrapped the dead woman in her shroud, laid her upon the bed, lighted the tapers all about, arranged the basin of holy water, the branch of boxwood and the crucifix, in accordance with the custom of the province, closed the shutters and drew the curtains; later the vicar came to pass the night in prayer with Louis, who would not leave his mother. On Monday morning, the burial took place. The old nurse and the children, accompanied by the farmer's wife, were the only ones who followed to the grave the body of a woman whose wit and beauty and charm were renowned throughout Europe, and whose funeral, in London, would have been pompously described in the newspapers as a sort of aristocratic solemnity, had she not committed the most venial of all crimes, a crime always punished in this world, in order that these angels, their sins forgiven, may enter the kingdom of Heaven. When the earth was thrown upon his mother's

coffin, Marie wept, realizing then that he should see her no more.

A simple wooden cross, planted upon her grave, bore this inscription, placed thereon by order of the Curé of Saint-Cyr :

HERE LIES

AN UNHAPPY WOMAN,

WHOSE NAME IN HEAVEN IS AUGUSTA.

DIED AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-SIX.

Pray for her !

When all was over, the two children returned to La Grenadière for one last look at the house ; then, holding each other by the hand, they prepared to take their departure with Annette, leaving everything in the care of the farmer, and requesting him to give all necessary information to the officers of the law.

Thereupon the old nurse called to Louis from the steps of the pump, took him aside and said to him :

“Monsieur Louis, here is madame’s ring!”

The child wept, deeply moved to receive a living souvenir of his dead mother. With all his strength of character he had not thought of that last duty.

He embraced the old woman. Then they all three went down the hidden path, descended the stone staircase and went on to Tours without turning their heads.

"Mamma used to come here," said Marie when they reached the bridge.

Annette had an old cousin, a retired dressmaker, on Rue de la Guerche, at Tours. She took the two boys to her kinswoman's house, expecting that they would all live together there. But Louis explained his plans to her, handed her the certificate of Marie's birth and the ten thousand francs; then, still accompanied by the old nurse, he took his brother to the college. He described the position of affairs to the principal, very succinctly, and went away again, taking his brother with him to the gate. There he talked to him most seriously and affectionately as to his future conduct, telling him that they were all alone in the world, and after looking into his face a moment, kissed him, looked at him again, wiped away a tear, and finally went his way, turning around several times in order not to lose sight of his brother till the last moment, as he stood in the gateway of the college.

A month later Louis-Gaston, duly enrolled as an apprentice, was on board a man-of-war leaving the roadstead of Rochefort. Leaning upon the bulwarks of the corvette *Iris*, he watched the French coast receding rapidly and fading from sight on the blue line of the horizon. Soon he was alone, lost in the middle of the ocean, as he was in the world and in life.

"You mustn't weep, my boy! there's a God for all of us," said an old sailor in his hoarse voice, which was at once rough and kindly.

The child thanked him with a look instinct with pride. Then he hung his head and resigned himself to a sailor's life. He had become a father.

Angoulême, August, 1832.

GOBSECK

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MME. DE RESTAUD, GOBSECK AND
DERVILLE

"Frightful confusion reigned in the chamber. Dishveeled, desperate, her eyes gleaming with excitement, the countess stood, dumfounded, amid a confused heap of clothes, papers and trinkets. The disorder was simply frightful, in presence of the dead. The breath had hardly left the count's body before his wife had forced open all the drawers and the secretary."

TO MONSIEUR LE BARON BARCHOU DE PENHOEN

We are, I think, the only ones of all the pupils at Vendôme, who have fallen in with one another in the career of letters,—we, who were made to study philosophy at an age when we should have studied nothing but the *De Viris* ! This is the book I was writing when we met again, while you were engaged on your admirable works upon German philosophy. Thus neither of us has missed his vocation. You will, therefore, I doubt not, take as much pleasure in seeing your name here as it has afforded me to write it.

Your old college comrade,

DE BALZAC.

GOBSECK

*

At one o'clock one morning, during the winter of 1829-30, two persons, not members of her family, were still in the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu's salon. A handsome young man left the room as he heard the clock strike. As his carriage rumbled across the courtyard, the viscountess, seeing that everybody had gone save her brother and a friend of the family who were finishing a game of piquet, walked up to her daughter, who was standing by the fireplace in the salon, making a pretence of examining a porcelain shade, and listening to the noise made by the cabriolet, in a way to justify her mother's fears.

"Camille, if you continue to act as you have this evening with the young Comte de Restaud, you will compel me to refuse to receive him. Listen to me, my child, and if you have confidence in my affection, allow me to be your guide at present. At seventeen, a girl has no means of judging the future or the past, or of taking account of certain social considerations. I will call your attention to but one thing. Monsieur de Restaud has a mother who would make away with millions, a woman of obscure birth, a Demoiselle Goriot who caused a great

deal of talk at one time. She behaved so badly to her father that she certainly doesn't deserve to have so good a son. The young count adores her and supports her with a filial respect worthy of all praise; he is especially devoted to his brother and sister.—But, admirable as such conduct is," added the viscountess, with a knowing look, "as long as his mother lives any family would tremble to think of entrusting a young girl's future and her fortune to young Restaud."

"I overheard a few words which lead me to interpose between you and Mademoiselle de Grandlieu," cried the friend of the family.—"It's my game, Monsieur le Comte," he said to his opponent. "I leave you and rush to the assistance of your niece."

"That's what you call having a lawyer's ears," cried the viscountess. "My dear Derville, how could you hear what I was saying to Camille in an undertone?"

"I understood your expression," replied Derville, taking his seat on a couch at one side of the fireplace.

The uncle placed himself beside his niece and Madame de Grandlieu took up her position on a low chair between her daughter and Derville.

"It is time, Madame la Vicomtesse, for me to tell you a little story which will make you modify your opinion as to the fortunes of Comte Ernest de Restaud."

"A story?" cried Camille. "Pray begin at once, monsieur."

Derville gave Madame de Grandlieu a glance that convinced her that the story would be of interest to her. The Vicomtesse de Grandlieu was by reason of her wealth and the antiquity of her name one of the most notable women of Faubourg Saint-Germain; and, if it seems unnatural that a Parisian solicitor should be permitted to address her so familiarly and to make himself so perfectly at home beneath her roof, the phenomenon is, nevertheless, easily explained. Madame de Grandlieu, having returned to France with the royal family, took up her abode in Paris, where she lived at first upon such monies as were awarded her by Louis XVIII. from the Civil List, an intolerable position. The solicitor was shrewd enough to detect some irregularities of form in the sale of the Grandlieu mansion by the Republic, and claimed that it should be restored to the viscountess. He undertook a lawsuit to that end, for a fee fixed beforehand, and won it. Encouraged by this success, he used the technicalities of the law to such good purpose upon some hospital or other that he compelled restitution of the forest of Liceney. He also succeeded in recovering certain shares in the Orléans canal, and divers pieces of valuable real estate with which the Emperor had endowed different public institutions. Thus rehabilitated by the young solicitor's skilful management, Madame de Grandlieu's fortune had risen to a point at which it yielded her about sixty thousand francs a year, when the enactment of the indemnity law restored enormous sums to her. Being

a man of signal probity, well-informed, a pleasant companion, and extremely modest withal, the solicitor, thereupon, became the friend of the family. Although his conduct of Madame de Grandlieu's affairs won for him the esteem and the patronage of the best families in Faubourg Saint-Germain, he never took advantage of his opportunities as an ambitious man might have done. He resisted the offers of the viscountess, who tried to induce him to sell his office and accept an appointment to the magistracy, a career in which he was certain of rapid advancement, with her for his patroness. With the exception of the Grandlieu mansion, where he sometimes passed the evening, he went into society only so much as was necessary to keep up his connections. It was very fortunate for him that his talents had been brought to light by Madame de Grandlieu, for he would have run the risk of allowing his business to run to waste. Derville had not a solicitor's heart.

Since Comte Ernest de Restaud had become a frequent visitor at the viscountess's, and Derville had detected Camille's inclination for the young man, he had become as constant in his attendance upon Madame de Grandlieu as any dandy of the Chaussée d'Antin, recently admitted to the charmed circle of the nobility of the faubourg. A few days before, he had happened to be standing near Camille at a ball, and had said to her, pointing to the young count:

"It's a pity that boy hasn't two or three millions, isn't it?"

"Is it a misfortune? I don't think so," she replied. "Monsieur de Restaud has much talent, he is extremely well-informed, and thought much of by the minister in whose service he is. I have no doubt that he'll become a man of note. *That boy* will have all the money he wants the day he goes into the ministry."

"Yes, but suppose he were rich now?"

"Suppose he were rich?" said Camille, blushing. "Why all the young women here would be fighting for him," she added, pointing to the quadrilles.

"And in that case," rejoined the solicitor, "Mademoiselle de Grandlieu would no longer be the only one upon whom he turned his eyes. That's why you blush! You have a sort of liking for him, haven't you? Come, tell me."

Camille rose abruptly.

"She loves him," thought Derville.

Ever since that day, Camille had been unusually attentive to the solicitor, feeling certain that he approved her liking for young Ernest de Restaud. Hitherto, although she was fully aware of all her family owed Derville, she had had a feeling of respect for him rather than true friendship, had treated him rather courteously than affectionately; her manners, as well as the tone of her voice, had made him conscious of the distance etiquette placed between them. Gratitude is a debt which children do not always accept according to the inventory.

"This incident," Derville began, after a pause, "reminds me of the only romantic circumstances in

my life. You are laughing already," he continued, "to hear a solicitor talking of romance in connection with his life! But I was twenty-five once like everybody else, and at that age I had seen many strange things. I should begin by telling you something of an individual whom you can not know. I speak of a usurer. Mark well the pale, sallow face, which I wish the Academy would permit me to call a *lunar* face. It resembled silver-gilt with the gilt rubbed off. My usurer's hair was long and straight, always carefully combed, and of an ashy-gray color. His features, inscrutable as Talleyrand's, seemed to have been cast in bronze. His little eyes, yellow as a polecat's, had almost no eyelashes and shrank from the light, but the peak of an old cap shielded them from it. His pointed nose was so thin at the end that you might have likened it to a gimlet. He had the thin lips of the alchemist and little wizened old men drawn by Rubens or Metzu. He spoke very low, in a soft voice, and never lost his temper. His age was a problem; no one knew whether he was prematurely old or had been sparing of his youth so that it would be always serviceable to him. Everything was clean but threadbare in his chamber, which, from the green cloth on the desk to the bed-covering, was like the uninviting sanctuaries of old maids who pass whole days rubbing their furniture. In winter, the sticks of wood on his hearth were always buried in a mound of ashes, and smoked without blazing. His actions, from the time he left his bed in the morning

to his never-failing paroxysm of coughing in the evening, were as regular as the movements of a clock. He was, so to speak, the *model of a man*, wound up every night by sleep. If you touch a worm crawling along a piece of paper, he stops and pretends to be dead; in the same way, this man would stop short in the middle of a sentence if a wagon passed by, in order not to strain his voice. He imitated Fontenelle by economizing his supply of vitality and concentrated all the human feelings in the *I*. His life flowed along with no more noise than that made by the sand in an old-fashioned hourglass. Sometimes his victims made a great outcry, lost their heads; then there would be a deathlike silence, as in a kitchen after a duck's throat has been cut. Toward evening the man of notes was changed to an ordinary man and his metallic nature was metamorphosed into a human heart. If he was satisfied with his day's work he would rub his hands, giving vent to a sort of smoke of good-humor through the deep wrinkles of his face—it is impossible to describe in any other way the dumb play of his muscles, which expressed a sensation not unlike the hollow laughter of *Leatherstocking*. In his greatest outbursts of joy, however, his conversation was still in monosyllables, and his countenance was always negative.

“Such was the man whom chance gave me for a neighbor in the house I lived in on Rue des Grès, when I was nothing more than a second clerk and was finishing my third year as a law student.

The house, which has no courtyard, is damp and dark. The rooms get no light except from the street. The monastic division of the building into chambers of equal size, which have no other issue than a long corridor lighted by *borrowed lights*, proves that the house once formed part of a convent. At this depressing prospect the gay humor of an improvident youth would expire before he entered my neighbor's apartments; his house and he were much alike. You would have thought it was an oyster and its shell. The only being with whom he had any communication, in a social way, was myself; he came to me for fire, borrowed newspapers and books from me, and permitted me to enter his cell in the evening, when we would talk together if he was in good humor. These marks of confidence were the result of our four years' proximity, and of my careful mode of life, which, for lack of means, greatly resembled his. Had he kinsfolk or friends? was he rich or poor? No one could answer those questions. I never saw money in his room. His fortune was in the vaults of the Banque, no doubt. He collected his notes himself, running about Paris as clean-limbed as a stag. He was the victim of his own prudence, however. One day he happened to have some money about him; a double napoléon made its way, heaven knows how, from his pocket to the floor. A tenant who was going upstairs behind him picked up the gold-piece and handed it to him.

“‘That don't belong to me,’ said he, with a

gesture of surprise. 'Offer gold to me! Do I live as if I was a rich man?'

"In the morning he made his own coffee over an iron chafing-dish, which always stood in the dark corner of his fireplace; his dinner was brought from a cook-shop. Our old concierge went up at the same time every day to set his room to rights. Lastly, by a strange freak of fate which Sterne would have called predestination, this man's name was Gobseck. Afterward, when I did business for him, I learned that at the time we first knew each other he was about seventy-six years old. He was born about 1740 in one of the suburbs of Anvers; his mother was a Jewess and his father a Dutchman, and his name was Jean-Esther van Gobseck. You know how excited Paris was over the assassination of a woman called *La Belle Hollandaise*? When I happened to mention it to my venerable neighbor, he remarked, without expressing the slightest interest or surprise:

" 'She was my grandniece.'

"Those were the only words called forth by the death of his sole and only heir, his sister's grandchild. The newspapers told me that *La Belle Hollandaise's* name was Sara van Gobseck. When I asked him how it happened that his grandniece bore his name, he replied with a smile:

" 'The women are never married in our family.'

"The extraordinary creature had always refused to see a single person belonging to the four generations of females which comprised all his kindred.

He abhorred his heirs, and did not realize that his fortune could ever belong to anybody but himself, even after he was dead. When he was ten years old his mother had shipped him as a cabin-boy to the Dutch colonies in the East Indies, where he had knocked about for twenty years. So it was that the wrinkles on his yellow forehead kept the secret of horrible occurrences, of sudden terrors, of unexpected good fortune, of romantic disasters, of infinite enjoyment; hunger endured, love trampled under foot, fortune endangered, lost and found again, life many times imperilled and saved, perhaps, by resolutions whose cruelty was excused by the urgent need of prompt action. He had known Admiral Simeuse, Monsieur de Lally, Monsieur de Kergarouët, Monsieur d'Estaing, the Magistrate of Suffren, Monsieur de Portenduère, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Hastings, Tippoo-Sahib's father and Tippoo-Sahib himself. That Savoyard, who was in the service of Madhadji-Sindiab, King of Delhi, and contributed so materially to found the power of the Mahrattas, had done business with him. He had had relations with Victor Hughes and several famous corsairs, for he had lived a long while at Saint-Thomas. He had left no stone unturned to make his fortune and had even tried to discover the gold mine of the famous tribe of savages in the neighborhood of Buenos-Ayres. He was familiar with all the details of the American Revolution. But, when he spoke of the Indies or America, which he very rarely did with me, never with anyone else, he always seemed

to look upon it as an indiscreet act and to repent of it afterward. If humanity and sociability have any part in religion, he might be deemed an atheist. Although I undertook to examine it, I must confess to my shame, that up to the last moment I found his heart impenetrable. I sometimes wondered to what sex he belonged. If all usurers are like that one it's my opinion that they're of the neuter gender. Had he clung to his mother's religion and did he look upon Christians as his lawful prey? had he turned Catholic, Mahometan, Brahmin or Lutheran? I never found out anything about his religious opinions. He seemed to me to be indifferent rather than an unbeliever. One evening, I entered the room of this man, who had transformed himself into gold, and to whom his victims—his clients he called them—gave the name of Papa Gobseck, whether in jest or by antiphrasis I know not. I found him in his easy-chair, motionless as a statue, with his eyes fixed upon the mantelpiece, as if he were reading over his balance-sheets. A smoking lamp, the pedestal of which had once been green, cast a feeble light, which, instead of giving color to his face, seemed to emphasize its pallor. He looked at me without speaking, and pointed to my chair which was waiting for me.

“‘What can the creature be thinking about?’ I said to myself. ‘Does he know whether there are such things as God and feeling and women and happiness?’”

“I pitied him as I would have pitied a sick man.

But I realized also that, although he had millions at the Banque, he might possess in thought the land he had traveled over, burrowed in, weighed and appraised and exploited.

“ ‘Good-evening, Papa Gobseck,’ said I.

“ ‘He turned his head toward me and his heavy black eyebrows drew somewhat closer together; that characteristic movement was, in his case, equivalent to a Southerner’s brightest smile.

“ ‘You’re as downcast as you were the day they came and told you of the failure of that bookseller, whose shrewdness you admired so much, although you were victimized by it.’

“ ‘Victimized?’ he replied with a surprised look.

“ ‘In order to arrange his composition, didn’t he adjust your claim by notes signed by the house in bankruptcy; and when he was on his feet again, didn’t he force you to accept the reduction provided for in the composition?’

“ ‘He was shrewd,’ he replied, ‘but I got even with him.’

“ ‘Have you any notes to protest? It’s the thirtieth of the month, I believe.’

“ ‘It was the first time I had ever mentioned money matters to him. He raised his eyes to mine with a mocking expression; then, in his soft voice, whose tones resembled the sounds extracted from a flute by a novice who doesn’t know how to manage the mouthpiece:

“ ‘I am amused,’ he said.

“ ‘Then you are amused sometimes?’

“ ‘Do you think there are no poets but those who print verses?’ he asked, shrugging his shoulders and casting a pitying glance at me.

“ ‘Poetry in that head!’ I thought, for as yet I knew nothing of his life.

“ ‘Whose existence can be as bright as mine?’ he continued, and his eyes sparkled. ‘You are young, you have the ideas that go with your young blood, you see women’s faces in your embers; I see nothing but charred wood in mine. You believe in everything; I believe in nothing. Keep your illusions if you can. I’m going to discount your life. Whether you travel, whether you sit at home in the chimney corner with your wife, there comes a time when life is nothing but habit, practised amid certain surroundings that you like. Happiness then consists in the exercise of our faculties applied to the realities of life. Outside of those two precepts, everything is false. My principles have changed like those of most men; I have had to vary them for every latitude. What Europe admires, Asia punishes. The thing that is a vice in Paris is a necessity when one has passed the Azores. Nothing is unchangeable on this earth; we deal only with conventions which are modified according to the different climates. To the man who has been run through all the social mills by force, convictions and morals are simply meaningless words. There remains alive in us the only genuine sentiment nature has implanted in our hearts: the instinct of self-preservation. In your European societies this

instinct is called *self-interest*. If you had lived as long as I have, you would have learned that there is but one material thing, whose value is sufficiently definite for man to bother his head about it. That thing is—GOLD. Gold represents all the human forces. I have traveled, I have seen that there are plains and mountains everywhere; the plains weary you, the mountains tire you out; localities therefore mean nothing. As for morals, man is the same everywhere; everywhere the battle between rich and poor is being fought out, everywhere it is inevitable; so it's better to work somebody else than to be worked yourself; everywhere you find strong men working and lazy men worrying; everywhere the pleasures are the same, for the passions are being drained to the dregs everywhere, and but one sentiment survives: vanity! Vanity is always *myself*. Vanity is satisfied only with rivers of gold. Our caprices demand time, physical resources or constant attention. Gold contains all these in germ and furnishes everything in reality. Only fools and invalids can take any pleasure in shuffling cards every evening to find out whether they can win a few sous. Only donkeys employ their time wondering what is going on, whether Madame So-and-so is lying upon her couch alone or in company, if she has more blood than lymph, more passion than virtue. Only dupes can fancy that they do any good to their kind by putting forth political principles to govern events that always come unexpectedly. Only idiots love to talk about actors and

repeat their words; to take every day, over a greater extent of a territory, the same kind of a walk a wild animal takes in his cage; to dress for others, to eat for others, to boast of a horse or a carriage their neighbors can't have for three days to come. Isn't that Parisian life condensed into a few sentences? Let us look at life on a higher plane than they do. Happiness consists either in powerful emotions which use up one's strength or in regular occupations which make of life an English machine that does its work in a given time. Above these sorts of happiness, there is a curiosity, alleged to be praiseworthy, to know the secrets of nature or to succeed in imitating its effects. Is it not, in two words, art or science, passion or peace? Very good; all the human passions, enhanced by the manœuvring of your social interests, come and parade before my eyes, as I lead my peaceful life. Thereupon I substitute for your scientific curiosity,—a sort of struggle in which man is always worsted,—the art of penetrating the mechanism of all the springs which govern the impulses of mankind. In a word, I own the world, without the fatigue of taking possession, and the world has not the slightest hold upon me. Hark ye,' he continued, 'if I tell you what happened this morning, you will understand wherein my pleasure consists.'

"He rose, bolted his door, drew together a pair of old tapestry curtains, whose rings squeaked upon the rod, and then returned to his seat.

" 'This morning,' he said, 'I had only two notes

to collect; the others were turned over to my customers as cash the night before. So much gained! for I always deduct, with the discount, the expense of making the collection,—forty sous for an imaginary cabriolet! Wouldn't it be a joke for me to travel about Paris for a customer, for a discount of six francs, I who obey nobody and pay a tax of only seven francs! The first note—for a thousand francs—presented by a young man, a pretty fellow with a gold-laced waistcoat, single eyeglass, tilbury, English horse, etc., was signed by one of the prettiest women in Paris, wife of a rich landowner, a count. Why had this countess signed a note of hand, good for nothing in law, but worth its face value in fact; for those poor women fear the scandal a protested note would cause in their households, and they'd give themselves in payment rather than not pay? I'd like to know the secret consideration of that note. Was it stupidity, imprudence, love or charity? The second note, for the same sum, signed *Fanny Malvaut*, was handed to me by a linen-draper on the verge of ruin. Nobody who has any credit at the Bank ever comes to my shop, for the first step from my door to my desk betokens despair, imminent bankruptcy, and more than all else, a refusal of accommodation by all the bankers. So I see nobody but stags driven to bay by the howling pack of their creditors. The countess lived on Rue du Helder, and my Fanny on Rue Montmartre. What conjectures passed through my mind as I went away from here this morning! If the two women

were not ready to pay, they would receive me with greater respect than if I were their father. What monkey tricks wouldn't the countess play on me for a thousand francs! She would be very affectionate, talk to me in the wheedling voice kept in reserve for the holder of promissory notes, lavish soft words on me, entreat me perhaps; and I'—At that the old man turned his colorless eyes upon me—'And I am immovable!' he continued. 'I appear there as an avenger, as the personification of remorse. Let us have done with hypotheses. I reached the house.

"“Madame la Comtesse is in bed,” a maid informed me.

"“When will she be visible?”

"“At noon.”

"“Is Madame la Comtesse ill?”

"“No, monsieur, but she didn't return from the ball till three o'clock.”

"“My name is Gobseck; tell her my name, and that I will be here at noon.”

"“And I went away, leaving the marks of my presence on the rug that covers the tiled floor of the hall. I love to soil a rich man's carpet, not from any petty meanness, but to make him feel the claws of Necessity. When I arrived at a certain house of poor appearance on Rue Montmartre, I pushed upon an old porte-cochère, and found myself in a dark courtyard which the sun never reaches. The porter's lodge was black, the glass was like the sleeve of a watered silk dress that's been worn too long; it was greasy and dark and spotted.

“ “ “Mademoiselle Fanny Malvaut?”

“ “ “She has gone out; but if you have come about a note, the money’s here.”

“ “ “I will come again,” I said.

“ “ “As soon as I learned that the concierge had the money I was anxious to know the girl; I imagined that she must be pretty. I passed the morning looking at the pictures displayed on the boulevard; and just as twelve o’clock was striking, I passed through the salon adjoining the countess’s bedroom.

“ “ “Madame rang for me just this moment,” said the maid; “I don’t think you can see her.”

“ “ “I’ll wait,” I replied, sitting down in an easy-chair.

“ “ “The blinds were thrown open, the maid came running back to me, and said:

“ “ “Walk in, monsieur.”

“ “ “From her honeyed tones I guessed that her mistress was not ready to pay. What a lovely creature I saw before me! She had hastily thrown a cashmere shawl over her bare shoulders, and had drawn it so tight that the outlines of her figure could be followed with perfect ease. She was dressed in a peignoir trimmed with ruffles white as snow, which indicated an annual expenditure of about two thousand francs for washing. Her black hair escaped in large curls from beneath a pretty Madras cap tied carelessly upon her head after the Creole fashion. Her bed presented a picture of disorder, the result doubtless of disturbed sleep. A painter would have paid a handsome price to remain for a

few moments in the midst of that scene. Beneath the sumptuous draperies a pillow buried in an eider-down bolster covered with blue silk—the lace garniture of the pillow sharply defined against the blue background—showed the impression of vague forms which awoke the imagination. Upon a large bearskin, spread at the feet of the lions carved in the mahogany bedstead, were white satin shoes, tossed there with the indifference caused by the fatigue of the ball. Upon a chair was a rumpled dress, the sleeves of which touched the floor. Stockings that the least breath of air would have blown away were twisted into the legs of an easy-chair. White garters were hanging down from a sofa. A valuable fan, half-open, glistened on the mantelpiece. The drawers of the commode were open. Flowers, diamonds, gloves, a bouquet, a belt, lay about here and there. I inhaled a vague odor of perfumery. All was luxury and confusion, beauty without harmony. But already, for her or for her adorer, Want, crouching beneath, was rearing its head and making its sharp teeth felt. The countess's tired face resembled the room with the débris of a fête scattered about. The paltry gewgaws aroused my pity; taken together they had been the cause of some mad frolic the night before. Those vestiges of a passion struck down by remorse, that image of a life of dissipation, luxury and excitement, betrayed the efforts of Tantalus to seize fleeting pleasures. Some red spots here and there upon the young woman's face attested the fineness of her skin; but

her features had grown coarse, as it were, and the dark rings under her eyes seemed more clearly marked than usual. Nevertheless, nature was still sufficiently powerful in her to prevent these symbols of folly from destroying her beauty. Her eyes sparkled. Like one of the Herodiads from Leonardo da Vinci's brush—I acquired the pictures second-hand—she was magnificent in life and strength; there was no sign of low birth in her figure or her features; she inspired love, and it seemed to me that she was likely to be stronger than love. She pleased me. It was a long time since my heart had beaten fast. So I was paid already! I would give a thousand francs for a sensation that would recall my youth.

““Monsieur,” said she, offering me a chair, “will you be kind enough to wait?”

““Until noon to-morrow, madame,” I replied, folding up the note I had handed to her; “I haven’t any right to protest it until then.”

““With that, I said to myself:

“““Pay for your luxury, pay for your name, pay for your good fortune, pay for the monopoly you enjoy! The rich invented the courts to protect their property, and they invented judges and the guillotine, the candle at which ignorant people burn their fingers. But, for you who lie on silk and under silk, there is remorse and gnashing of teeth hidden under a smile, and fantastic lion’s jaws that gnaw at your heart.”

“““Protest it! can you think of such a thing?”

she cried, looking me in the face; "you would have so little consideration for me?"

" "If the king owed me money, madame, and didn't pay me, I would hunt him down more promptly than any other debtor."

" "At that moment we heard a soft tap at the chamber door.

" " "I am not at home!" said the young woman, imperiously.

" " "But I want very much to see you, Anastasie."

" " "Not at this moment, my dear," she replied, less harshly, but still in no pleasant tone.

" " "What nonsense! you are talking to some one," was the reply, and a man who could be no other than the count, entered the room.

" "The countess looked at me, I understood her and she became my slave. There was a time, young man, when I might, perhaps, have been fool enough not to protest the note. In 1763, at Pondicherry, I let a woman off who cheated me handsomely. I deserved it, for why did I trust her?

" " "What is monsieur's business?" the count asked me.

" "I saw his wife trembling from head to foot, the soft, white flesh of her neck became rough; she was, to use a slang expression, all goose flesh. As for myself, I was laughing, and not one of my muscles was disturbed.

" " "Monsieur is one of my tradesmen," said she.

" "The count turned his back on me, and I took the note half out of my pocket. At that inexorable

movement, the young woman came up to me and handed me a diamond.

““Take this,” she said, “and go.”

““We exchanged the two pieces of property, I saluted her and took my leave. The diamond was worth enough to give me twelve hundred francs profit. I found in the courtyard a crowd of servants brushing their liveries, polishing their boots, or washing handsome carriages.

“““This,” said I, “is what brings such people to me. This is what leads them on to steal millions with an appearance of decency, and to betray their country. In order not to soil his boots by going on foot, the great lord, or the man who apes his ways, takes a mud bath once for all!”

““At that moment the great gate opened and admitted the cabriolet of the young man who had brought me the note.

“““Monsieur,” said I, when he had alighted, “here are two hundred francs which I beg you to hand to Madame la Comtesse, and you will please say to her that I will hold the pledge she gave me this morning subject to redemption for a week.”

““He took the two hundred francs, and smiled satirically, as if to say; “Aha! she has paid, has she? Faith, so much the better!” I read the countess’s future on that face. This pretty, blond monsieur, cold-blooded, a heartless gambler, will ruin himself, will ruin her, will ruin the husband, will ruin the children, will run through their *dots*, and

will cause more destruction among the salons than a mortar battery in a regiment.

“‘I went on to Rue Montmartre, to Mademoiselle Fanny’s. I ascended a narrow and very steep stairway. When I reached the fifth floor, I was ushered into a suite consisting of two rooms, where everything was as clean as a new ducat. I could not detect the slightest trace of dust on the furniture of the first room, in which I was received by Mademoiselle Fanny, a young Parisian damsel, simply dressed: a fresh, refined face, affable expression, chestnut hair, well-combed, and arched over her temples in such a way as to give a peculiar delicacy to her blue eyes, transparent as crystal. The sun, passing through muslin curtains hung close to the glass, cast a soft light upon her modest features. Numerous pieces of cut-out linen lying about showed me that her customary occupation was that of sempstress. She seemed like the genius of solitude. As I handed her the note, I remarked that I had failed to find her in the morning.

“““Why,” said she, “the concierge had the money.”

““I pretended not to understand.

“““Mademoiselle goes out early apparently?”

“““I am rarely away from home; but when one works at night, one must take a bath sometime.”

““I looked at her. At a single glance I guessed the whole story. She was a girl who had been forced to work for her living by misfortune, and probably belonged to some family of honest farmers,

for she had some suggestions of the ruddy complexion peculiar to persons born in the country. There was an indefinable air of virtue about her. It seemed that I was breathing an atmosphere of sincerity and innocence, which refreshed my lungs. Poor child! she believed in something: her simple cot of painted wood was surmounted by a crucifix, with a branch of boxwood on either side. I was touched to a certain extent. I felt disposed to offer her money at twelve per cent only, in order to help her to purchase a little establishment.

“ “But,” I said to myself, “perhaps she has a second cousin who would use her signature to get money for himself and sponge on the poor girl.”

“ “So I went away, fortifying myself against my generous impulses, for I have often had occasion to notice that, although benevolence does not injure the benefactor, it ruins its object. When you came in, I was thinking that Fanny Malvaut would make a nice little wife; I was contrasting her pure, solitary life with the life of that countess, who has already fallen as far as the note of hand and will keep on down to the lowest depths of vice!—Oh! well!” he continued, after a moment of absolute silence, during which I kept my eyes upon him, ‘do you think that it’s a matter of no importance to penetrate thus to the inmost recesses of the human heart, to become a part of the lives of others, and to see them laid bare before you? An ever-changing spectacle: ghastly wounds, deadly disappointments,

love scenes, wretched creatures for whom the waters of the Seine are waiting, youthful joys which lead to the scaffold, the laughter of despair and sumptuous fêtes. Yesterday, a tragedy: some honest father who asphyxiates himself because he can no longer support his children. To-morrow, a comedy: a young man will try to play the scene of Monsieur Dimanche with me, with variations suited to our time. You have heard the eloquence of some recent preachers extolled to the skies; I have wasted my time now and then going to listen to them; they have made me change my opinions, but my conduct, never! as somebody or other said. Well, those worthy priests, your Mirabeau, Vergniaud, the others, were only stammerers beside my orators. Often an amorous young girl, an old merchant on the downward path toward failure, a mother who seeks to hide her son's faults, an artist without bread, a great man whose favor is waning and who, for lack of money, is about to lose the fruit of his efforts, have made me shudder by the force of their words. Those sublime actors played for me alone, but could not deceive me. My glance is like God's, I can look to the bottom of men's hearts. Nothing is hidden from me. No one can refuse anything to him who ties and unties the strings of the money-bag. I am rich enough to purchase the consciences of those who pull the strings that move ministers, from the office-boys to their mistresses: isn't that Power? I can have the loveliest women and their softest caresses: isn't that Pleasure? Do not

Power and Pleasure sum up your whole social order? There are some half a score of us in Paris, silent, unknown kings, the arbiters of your destinies. Is life anything more than a machine for which money furnishes the motive power? Understand this, that means are forever confounded with results: you will never succeed in separating the heart from the passions, mind from matter. Gold is the spiritual essence of your present social structure. Allied by the similarity of our interests, we meet on certain days of the week at Café Thémis near Pont Neuf. There we reveal to one another the mysteries of finance. No apparent prosperity can deceive us, we possess the secrets of all families. We have a sort of *black book* in which are set down the most important memoranda concerning the public credit, the Bank, and business generally. We are the casuists of the Bourse and form a holy office where the most trivial transactions of everybody who has any means whatever are analyzed and judgment passed upon them, and our conclusions are always accurate. This one has an eye upon the judicial crowd, that one upon the financial crowd, another upon the commercial crowd, and another upon the government crowd. I keep my eye on the young gentlemen of family, artists, society men, and upon the gamblers, the most interesting class of people in Paris. Everyone tells us his neighbor's secrets. Betrayed passions, wounded vanity are garrulous. Vice, disappointment, revenge are the best police agents. Like myself, all

my confrères have tasted every form of enjoyment, have become sated with everything, and have reached a point where they love power and money solely for their own sakes. Here,' he said, pointing to his cold, bare room, 'the most quick-tempered of lovers who loses his temper and draws his sword at a word, implores with clasped hands! Here the proudest merchant, the vainest woman, the most swaggering soldier, all implore my aid with tears in their eyes, or rage or sorrow in their hearts. Here the most famous artist and the author whose name is promised to posterity, implore my aid. Here, in a word,' he added, putting his hand to his forehead, 'is a scale in which the heritages and financial interests of all Paris are weighed. Now do you think that there is no power of enjoyment under this white mask whose immobility has so often astonished you?' he said, putting forward his pallid face which fairly smelt of money.

"I returned to my own room in a state of stupefaction. The gaunt, little, old man had increased in size. He was transformed in my eyes to a grotesque figure personifying the power of gold. Life, mankind, horrified me.

"'Must everything be resolved by money?' I asked myself.

"I remember that I didn't fall asleep until very late. I saw heaps of gold all about me. The fair countess filled my thoughts. To my shame be it said, she completely eclipsed the picture of the

chaste, simple-minded creature, condemned to toil and obscurity; but the next morning, through the mists of my awakening, sweet Fanny appeared to me in all her beauty, and I no longer thought of any but her."

✱

"Will you have a glass of *eau sucrée*?" asked the viscountess, interrupting Derville.

"Thank you, yes," he said.

"I see nothing in all this that can concern us," said Madame de Grandlieu, as she rang the bell.

"Sardanapalus!" cried Derville, swearing his favorite oath, "I was just about to awaken Mademoiselle Camille by telling her that her happiness until lately depended upon Papa Gobseck; but as the good man has died, at the age of eighty-nine, Monsieur de Restaud will soon come into possession of a handsome fortune. That requires explanation. As for Fanny Malvaut, you know her; she's my wife!"

"The poor boy," rejoined the viscountess, "would admit it before twenty people with his usual frankness."

"I would shout it from the housetops," said the solicitor.

"Drink, drink, my dear Derville. You will never be anything but the happiest and best of men."

"I left you on Rue du Helder at a countess's," cried the uncle, raising his head with a slightly dazed expression. "What did you do with her?"

"A few days after my conversation with the old Dutchman," continued Derville, "I passed my examination. I was admitted to practice and in due time

became an advocate. The old man's confidence in me increased amazingly. He consulted me gratis on all the ticklish affairs he engaged in upon reliable data—affairs that would have seemed very dubious to any practitioner. This man, over whom no one could ever gain the slightest ascendancy, listened to my advice with something like respect. To be sure, it was always very good. Finally, on the day I was appointed chief clerk in the office where I had been at work three years, I left the house on Rue des Grès, and went to live with my employer, who gave me board and lodging and a hundred and fifty francs a month. That was a great day! When I bade the usurer farewell, he gave no sign of friendship or displeasure and didn't ask me to come and see him; he simply gave me one of those glances which, from him, seemed to denote the gift of second-sight. A week later, I received a visit from my former neighbor; he came to consult me upon a matter of some difficulty, an ejectment; he continued his gratuitous consultations as freely as if he were paying me for them. Toward the end of the second year, from 1818 to 1819, my employer, who was a man addicted to pleasure and very extravagant, became considerably embarrassed pecuniarily, and was obliged to sell his commission. Although at that time, lawyers' offices had not acquired the exaggerated value placed upon them to-day, my employer demanded a hundred and fifty thousand francs for his. An active, well-read, intelligent man could make a decent living, pay the interest on that sum and clear

himself in ten years, however little confidence he inspired. I was the seventh son of a small tradesman at Noyon, I hadn't an obolus, and I knew no other capitalist than Papa Gobseck in the world. An ambitious impulse, and a vague ray of hope lent me the courage to apply to him. And so, one evening, I betook myself slowly to Rue des Grès. My heart was beating very fast when I knocked at the door of the gloomy house. I remembered all the old miser had once said to me at a time when I was very far from suspecting the intensity of the anguish that began at that threshold. I was going to kneel to him like all the rest.

"'But no!' I said to myself, 'an honest man should maintain his dignity everywhere. The money isn't worth lowering myself for; I'll be as downright as he.'

"After I left the house, Papa Gobseck hired my room so that he need have no next door neighbor; he had also had a little barred wicket put in his door, and he didn't admit me until he had recognized my face.

"'Well,' he said in his piping voice, 'your master's selling his office.'

"'How do you know that? He hasn't mentioned it as yet to anybody but me.'

"The old man's lips drew apart toward the corners of his mouth exactly like curtains, and this mute smile was accompanied by an inscrutable glance.

"'Nothing less than that would have brought

you to my house,' he said drily, after a pause, to my utter confusion.

" 'Hear what I have to say, Monsieur Gobseck,' I continued in as calm a tone as I could command before this old man, who fixed his eyes upon me in a searching gaze that confused me.

"He made a gesture as if to say: 'Go on.'

" 'I know that it's very hard to move you. So I won't waste my eloquence trying to describe to you the situation of a clerk without a sou, who has no hope except in you, and has no other heart in the world but yours to which he can look for appreciation of his future. Let us leave the heart out of the question. Business must be done on business principles, and not as novels are written, by sentiment. These are the facts. My employer's business is worth about twenty thousand a year in his hands; but I believe that in mine it will be worth forty. He wants to sell it for fifty thousand crowns. I have a feeling here,' I said, striking my forehead, 'that if you could loan me the necessary money for the purchase, I should be free in ten years.'

" 'That's talking,' replied Papa Gobseck, taking my hand and pressing it. 'Never, since I have been in business,' he continued, 'has anyone set forth so clearly the purpose of his visit. Security?' he said, looking me over from head to foot. 'None at all,' he added, after a pause. 'How old are you?'

" 'I shall be twenty-five in ten days,' I replied; 'otherwise I couldn't go into business for myself.'

“ ‘True.’ ”

“ ‘Well, what do you say?’ ”

“ ‘It’s possible.’ ”

“ ‘We must move quickly, you know; if we don’t, somebody’ll be bidding more.’ ”

“ ‘Bring me your certificate of birth to-morrow morning, and we’ll talk the matter over; meanwhile, I’ll think about it.’ ”

“The next day, at eight o’clock, I was at the old man’s room. He took the official document, put on his glasses, coughed, expectorated, wrapped himself in his black greatcoat, and read the extract from the records of the mayor’s office from beginning to end. Then he turned around two or three times, looked at me, coughed again, moved uneasily in his chair, and said:

“ ‘We’ll try to arrange the matter for you.’ ”

“ ‘I started.

“ ‘I get fifty per cent for my money,’ he said; ‘sometimes a hundred, two hundred, five hundred per cent.’ ”

“ ‘At those words I turned pale.

“ ‘But, as we are old acquaintances, I will be content with twelve and a half per cent a—’ ”

“ ‘He hesitated.

“ ‘Well, yes, from you I will be content with thirteen per cent a year. Does that suit you?’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ I replied.

“ ‘If it’s too much,’ he retorted, ‘say so, Grotius!’ —He called me Grotius jocosely.—‘When I ask you thirteen per cent I’m attending to business; see if

you can pay it. I don't like a man who agrees to everything. Is it too much?"

"‘No,’ I said, ‘I shall simply have to suffer a little more discomfort.

“‘*Parbleu!*’ said he, with one of his sidelong, mischievous glances, ‘your clients will pay.’

“‘No, by all the devils!’ I cried, ‘I’ll pay myself. I would rather cut off my hand than bleed them!’

“‘Good-day,’ said Papa Gobseck.

“‘But the fees are all regulated by law,’ I continued.

“‘Not for compromises and compositions and settlements,’ said he. ‘In those matters you can count on your thousand francs, yes, or six thousand even, according to the importance of the interests involved, for your consultations, your going and coming, your drafts of deeds, your memorials and your talk. You must find out how to get hold of that sort of business. I will recommend you as the best informed and cleverest of solicitors, I will send you so many cases of the kind I speak of, that your brethren will burst with envy. Werbrust, Palma, Gigonnet, my confrères, will give you all their ejectments; and God knows they have plenty of them! Thus you’ll have two sets of clients, those you buy and those I’ll send you. You ought almost to pay me fifteen per cent for my hundred and fifty thousand francs.’

“‘All right, but no more,’ I said, with the determined air of a man who has resolved to yield no farther.

"Papa Gobseck relaxed somewhat and seemed satisfied with me.

" 'I will myself pay the money to your employer,' he said, 'in such a way as to secure a lien on the business and the guaranty fund.'

" 'Oh! whatever you choose in the way of security.'

" 'Then you will give me an acknowledgment of your indebtedness in the shape of fifteen bills of exchange, accepted in blank, each for the sum of ten thousand francs.'

" 'Provided that this twofold consideration is set forth—'

" 'No!' cried Gobseck, cutting me short. 'Why do you expect me to have more confidence in you than you have in me?'

" 'I said nothing.'

" 'And then,' he continued affably, 'you will do all my business for me free of charge as long as I live, won't you?'

" 'Yes, if I don't have to advance any money.'

" 'That's fair,' said he. 'By the way,' he continued, struggling to make his features assume a good-humored expression, 'you will allow me to come and see you?'

" 'You will always be most welcome.'

" 'Yes, but it will be hard to manage in the forenoon. You will have your business to attend to, and I shall have mine.'

" 'Come in the evening then.'

" 'Oh! no,' he replied, hastily, 'you ought to go

into society and see your clients. I have my friends to see at my café.'

" 'His friends!' I thought.—'Well, then,' I said, 'why not take the dinner-hour?'

" 'That's it,' said Gobseck. 'After the Bourse, at five o'clock. All right, you'll see me every Wednesday and Saturday. We'll talk over our business like two good friends. Ha! ha! sometimes I am very gay. Give me the wing of a partridge and a glass of champagne, and we'll talk. I know many things that can be told now, and that will teach you to know men and women, especially the latter.'

" 'Done for the partridge and the glass of champagne.'

" 'Don't make a fool of yourself; if you do, you will lose my confidence. Don't set up an expensive establishment. Have an old maid-servant, just one. I'll come and see you to make sure your health is good. I shall have money invested in your head, ha! ha! so I must keep an eye on your business. Well, come to-night with your master.'

" 'Could you tell me, if it isn't an impertinent question,' I said to the little old fellow as we stood at his door, 'what the certificate of my baptism had to do with this transaction?'

" Jean-Esther van Gobseck shrugged his shoulders and answered with a cunning leer:

" 'How stupid you youngsters are! Understand, master solicitor—for it's something you must know or else you'll get caught yourself—that before the

age of thirty, probity and talent are still valid pledges. After that age, you can't rely on a man.'

"He closed his door. Three months later, I was a solicitor. Soon I had the good fortune, madame, to be entrusted with the management of the process to compel the restitution of your property. My success in that litigation gave me a name. Notwithstanding the enormous interest I had to pay Gobseck, in less than five years I had paid off all my indebtedness. I married Fanny Malvaut, whom I loved sincerely. The similarity of our destinies, in respect to hard work and success, added strength to our affection. One of her uncles, a wealthy farmer, died and left her seventy thousand francs, which assisted materially in freeing me from debt. From that day my life has been all happiness and prosperity. So I'll say no more about myself, for nothing is so intolerable as a happy man. Let us return to our *dramatis personæ*. A year after I purchased my office I was induced to go, almost against my will, to a bachelor breakfast. It was the sequel of a wager lost by one of my brethren to a young man then much in vogue in fashionable society. Monsieur de Trailles, the flower of the *dandyism* of those days, enjoyed a tremendous reputation—"

"And he enjoys it still," interposed the Comte de Born. "No one dresses more stylishly or holds the reins over a tandem better than he. Maxime has the knack of playing cards and eating and drinking more gracefully than any other man in the world. He knows all about horses and hats and

pictures. All the women are mad over him. He always spends about a hundred thousand francs a year, and no one knows of a single piece of property he owns, nor a single title of interest. Maxime de Trailles is a type of the knight-errantry of our salons, our boudoirs, our boulevards, amphibious creatures who belong as much to one sex as the other; he's a strange creature, pleasant to everybody and good for nothing, feared and despised; he knows everything and nothing, is as capable of perpetrating a good deed as of resolving to commit a crime, sometimes cowardly, sometimes noble, covered with mud rather than stained with blood, troubled more by anxiety than by remorse, more concerned with his digestion than with reflection, feigning passions that he doesn't feel. A brilliant link uniting the galleys to the highest ranks of society, Maxime de Trailles belongs to that eminently intelligent class of men, which sometimes sends forth a Mirabeau, a Pitt, a Richelieu, but more frequently furnishes Comtes de Horn, Fouquier-Tinville and Coignards."

"I had heard a good deal about this individual," continued Derville, after listening to the viscountess's brother, "from Père Goriot, one of my clients, but I had shunned the dangerous honor of his acquaintance on several occasions before this, when I met him in society. However, my friend was so persistent in his attempts to induce me to go to his breakfast that I could not refuse without being charged with prudery. It would be hard for you to

imagine what a bachelor's breakfast is, madame. It is a scene of extraordinary magnificence and elegance, the splendor of a miser who, from vanity, becomes ostentatious for a day. Upon entering, you are amazed at the orderly arrangement of a table that blinds your eyes with its display of silver, crystal and glistening damask. Life is in full bloom; the young men are in good-humor, smiling, talking in undertones, like young brides;—everything about them is fresh and unsullied. Two hours later you would say that you were looking at a battle-field after the fight: on every side broken glasses, torn and rumpled napkins; broken meats sickening to the sight; ear-splitting shouts, jocose toasts, a fire of epigrams and wretched jokes, flushed faces, inflamed eyes that tell nothing, involuntary confidences that tell everything. Amid the infernal uproar some are breaking bottles, others humming *chansons*; the guests are hurling defiance at one another, embracing or fighting; a detestable perfume composed of a hundred different odors fills the air, and shouts composed of a hundred voices; no one knows what he is eating or drinking or saying; some are melancholy, others garrulous; this man has become a monomaniac and keeps repeating the same word like a tolling bell; that man seeks to drown the tumult; the coolest-headed proposes a debauch. If a man in possession of his senses should enter the room he would think he was at some feast of Bacchanals.

“It was in the midst of such a tumult as I have

described that Monsieur de Trailles attempted to make his way into my good graces. I had almost kept my head, and I was on my guard. As for him, although he pretended to be tipsy in a quiet way, he was quite cool and attending to business. In a word, I don't know how it happened, but when we left Grignon's salons about nine o'clock at night, he had completely bewitched me and I had promised to take him to our Papa Gobseck's the next morning. The words, 'honor, virtue, countess, virtuous woman, misfortune,' were scattered through his discourse as if by magic, thanks to his golden tongue. When I awoke the next morning and tried to remember what I had done the night before, I had hard work getting a few ideas together. However, I had a vague impression that the daughter of one of my clients was in danger of losing her reputation, as well as her husband's esteem and love, if she could not raise fifty thousand francs during the morning. There were gambling debts, carriage-builder's bills, money lost, God knows how. My bewitching boon companion had assured me that she was rich enough to repair the damage she was about to inflict upon her fortune, by living economically for a few years. Not until then did I begin to understand the reason of my friend's insistence. I confess, to my shame, that I had no suspicion how important a matter it was for Papa Gobseck to renew his relations with this dandy. As I was dressing, Monsieur de Trailles entered.

“‘Monsieur le Comte,’ I said, after we had exchanged the customary greetings, ‘I don’t see that you need me to introduce you to Van Gobseck, the most polished and guileless of capitalists. He will give you the money, if he has it, or rather, if you offer him sufficient security.’

“‘Monsieur,’ he replied, ‘I have no idea of forcing you to do me a service, even though you promised to do so.’

“‘Sardanapalus!’ I said to myself, ‘shall I let this fellow think that I break my promises?’

“‘I had the honor to tell you yesterday,’ he continued, ‘that I fell out with Papa Gobseck at a very inconvenient time. Now, as he’s about the only man in Paris who can pony up a hundred thousand francs in a moment, the day after the end of a month, I asked you to make my peace with him. But let us say no more about it—’

“‘And Monsieur de Trailles glanced at me with a politely insulting expression and prepared to take his leave.

“‘I am ready to go with you,’ I said.

“‘When we reached Rue des Grès, the dandy looked about on all sides with a degree of attention and apparent uneasiness that surprised me. His face became white and red and yellow by turns, and the perspiration stood on his brow when his eye fell on the door of Gobseck’s house. As we were alighting from the cabriolet, a hired carriage turned into the Rue des Grès. The young man’s falcon eye enabled him to distinguish a woman on

the back seat of the carriage. An expression of almost savage joy lighted up his face, as he called a small boy who was passing and gave him his horse to hold. We went up stairs to the old note-shaver's.

“‘Monsieur Gobseck,’ said I, ‘I have brought you one of my most intimate friends—whom I distrust as I do the devil himself!’ I added in the old man’s ear.—‘As a favor to me, I beg you to do what you can for him—at the regular rate—and help him out of his difficulty—if you’re so disposed.’

“Monsieur de Trailles bowed to the usurer, sat down, and prepared to listen, assuming a courtier-like attitude whose gracious condescension would have fascinated you; but my Gobseck sat motionless and impassive in his chair at the corner of the hearth. He resembled the statue of Voltaire under the peristyle of the Théâtre-Français, as it appears at night; by way of salutation he raised slightly the shabby cap with which his head was covered, and the patch of yellow skull he exhibited completed his resemblance to the marble figure.

“‘I haven’t any money except for my customers,’ he said.

“‘Are you angry because I went to somebody besides you to assist me to ruin myself?’ laughed the count.

“‘Ruin yourself!’ retorted Gobseck, ironically.

“‘Do you mean to tell me that a man who hasn’t anything, can’t ruin himself? But I challenge you to find a handsomer *capital* in Paris than this,’

cried the dandy, rising and turning about on his heels.

"This almost solemn buffoonery had no power to move Gobseck.

"'Am I not the intimate friend of the Ronquerolleses, the De Marsays, the Franchessinis, the two Vandenesses, the Ajuda-Pintos, of all the most fashionable young men in Paris, in short? At cards I am the chosen ally of a prince and an ambassador whom you know. I have sources of income at London, Carlsbad, Baden and Bath. Isn't that the most profitable of occupations?'

"'True.'

"'You use me as a sponge, *mordieu!* and you encourage me to swell in society, only to squeeze me dry at critical moments; but you are sponges, too, and death will squeeze you dry.'

"'Possibly.'

"'If it weren't for the spendthrifts, what would become of you? We belong to one another body and soul.'

"'True.'

"'Well then, shake hands and be magnanimous, old Papa Gobseck, if what I say is true and possible.'

"'You come to me,' replied the usurer coldly, 'because Girard, Palma, Werbrust and Gigonnet have their stomachs full of your notes, which they are offering everywhere for fifty per cent discount; and as they probably didn't furnish more than half their face value, they aren't worth twenty-five per

cent. Excuse me! Can I, in decency,' continued Gobseck, 'loan a single sou to a man who owes thirty thousand francs and hasn't a centime? You lost ten thousand francs day before yesterday at the Baron de Nucingen's ball.'

" 'Monsieur,' retorted the count, with admirable insolence, 'my private affairs don't concern you. The man whose debts aren't due owes nothing.'

" 'True.'

" 'My notes will be paid.'

" 'Possibly.'

" 'And at this moment the only question between us is whether I offer sufficient security for the sum I wish to borrow of you.'

" 'True.'

"At that moment we heard the hired cab stopping at the door.

" 'I am going to get something that will satisfy you perhaps,' cried the young man.

" 'O my son,' cried Gobseck, rising and holding out his arms to me, when the borrower had disappeared, 'if he has good security, you have saved my life! I should have died of mortification. Werbrust and Gigonnet intended to play a trick on me. Thanks to you I shall have the laugh on them to-night.'

"There was something frightful in the old man's joy. It was the only time he ever gave vent to his feelings before me. Although it lasted but a moment I shall never forget that outburst of savage delight.

“‘Be kind enough to remain here,’ he added, ‘although I am armed and sure of my aim, having hunted the tiger in days gone by, and done my part on a ship’s deck when it was win the fight or die, I am suspicious of that dandified rascal.’

“He sat down again in front of his desk. His face became pale and calm once more.

“‘Aha!’ he resumed, turning toward me, ‘doubtless you are about to see the lovely creature I once told you about—I hear an aristocratic step in the hall.’

“As he spoke the young man returned, escorting a woman in whom I recognized the countess, whose bedside reception Gobseck had described to me long before—one of good old Goriot’s daughters.

“The countess did not see me at first as I stood in a window recess with my face toward the street. As she entered the usurer’s damp, dark room, she looked distrustfully at Maxime. She was so lovely that I pitied her, for all her sins. Her heart was torn by some horrible anguish, for her haughty, noble features wore a convulsive expression, badly dissembled. The young man had become her evil genius. I had a feeling of admiration for Gobseck, who had predicted the destiny of these two creatures, four years before, on the strength of the first note of hand.

“‘Probably,’ I said to myself, ‘that monster with an angel’s face governs her by every possible appliance; vanity, jealousy, pleasure, the allurements of society.’”

“Why that woman’s very virtues were weapons

in his hands," cried the viscountess; "he made her shed tears of devotion, he aroused in her the innate generosity of our sex and he took a base advantage of her tenderness of heart to sell her illicit pleasure at a high price."

"I confess," said Derville, who did not understand the signs Madame de Grandlieu was making to him, "that I have no tears for the fate of that unhappy creature, who was such a brilliant figure in the eyes of the world, but so appalling to the man who could read her heart; no, but I shuddered with horror as I looked upon her assassin, that youth with the unclouded brow, the rosy lips, the charming smile, the white teeth, who resembled an angel. They were both in the presence of their judge at that moment, and he examined them as an old Dominican of the sixteenth century might have watched the torturing of two Moors in the subterranean vaults of the Holy Office.

"'Monsieur, is there any way of obtaining the value of these diamonds, reserving the right to redeem them?' she said in a trembling voice, handing him a jewel-case.

"'Yes, madame,' I interposed, coming forward.

"She looked at me, recognized me, shuddered, and darted at me the glance that means in every country: 'Hold your tongue!'

"'That is what we call a sale with right of redemption,' I continued, 'and it consists in delivering possession of any property, real or personal, for a definite time, at the expiration of which the

vender may resume possession of the property in question upon payment of a fixed sum.'

"She breathed more freely, Comte Maxime frowned; he suspected that upon that basis the usurer would advance a smaller sum on the diamonds, as they are a species of property liable to fall in value. Gobseck, unmoved, had seized his magnifying glass and was silently examining the jewels. If I live a hundred years I shall not forget his face. His pale cheeks were flushed; his eyes, in which the sparkle of the gems seemed to be reflected, gleamed with unnatural fire. He rose, walked to the window, held the diamonds close to his toothless mouth as if he would have devoured them. He mumbled indistinct words, as he raised the bracelets, the clusters, the necklaces, the tiaras one after another, and held them up to the light to judge of their water, their color and their cutting; he took them from the case, replaced them, took them up again and made the light play upon them, seeking to bring out all their brilliancy, more like a child than an old man, or rather like a child and an old man in one.

"'Beautiful diamonds! They would have been worth three hundred thousand francs before the Revolution. What water! There are your genuine Asiatic diamonds from Golconda or Vizapur! Do you know their value? No, no, Gobseck is the only man in Paris who can appreciate them. Under the Empire it would have taken more than two hundred thousand francs to make up such a set as that.'

"He made a gesture expressive of disgust and added:

" 'Now, diamonds are falling in value every day; Brazil has overstocked us with them since the peace and is filling the public squares with stones less white than those from India. The ladies don't wear them at court now. Does madame go to court?'

"As he uttered these terrible words, he scrutinized the stones, one after another, with indescribable joy.

" 'Not a flaw,' he said. 'Here's a speck—here's a flaw—A fine diamond!'

"His sallow face was so lighted up by the fire flashing from the jewels, that I mentally compared him to the old tarnished mirrors you see in country inns, which receive rays of light without reflecting them, and give to the traveler who is bold enough to look at himself in them, the aspect of a man stricken with apoplexy.

" 'Well,' said the count, tapping Gobseck on the shoulder.

"The old dotard started. He dropped the trinkets, placed the case on his desk, resumed his seat and was the usurer once more, cold and hard and smooth as a marble column.

" 'How much do you want?'

" 'A hundred thousand francs for three years,' said the count.

" 'Possibly,' said Gobseck, taking from a mahogany box a pair of scales invaluable by reason of their accuracy—his jewel-case!

"He weighed the stones, estimating at a glance—

God knows how!—the weight of the settings. During this operation there was a struggle between joy and sternness on the money-lender's features. The countess was plunged in a sort of stupor which I could understand, for she seemed to me to be measuring the height of the precipice from which she was falling. There was still some remorse in her woman's heart; perhaps it needed but an effort, a hand charitably held out to her, to save her. I made the trial.

“‘Are these diamonds yours, madame?’ I asked her in a distinct voice.

“‘Yes, monsieur,’ she replied, with a haughty glance in my direction.

“‘Make out the bill of sale, my talkative friend!’ said Gobseck to me, rising and pointing to his place at the desk.

“‘Madame is married, doubtless?’ I inquired.

“‘She hastily bent her head.

“‘I won’t draw the bill of sale!’ I cried.

“‘Why not?’ said Gobseck.

“‘Why not?’ I rejoined, drawing the old man into the window recess and speaking in a low voice. ‘This woman is subject to her husband and the sale will be void, for you can’t allege ignorance of a fact set out in the paper itself. So you will be compelled to give up the diamonds left with you in pawn, which must be described by weight, value, or cutting.’

“Gobseck interrupted me with a nod and turned to the two culprits.

“‘He’s right,’ he said. ‘This puts an entirely different face on the matter. Eighty thousand francs cash, and I keep the diamonds,’ he added in a low, soft voice. ‘When you’re dealing with chattels, possession is nine points of the law.’”

“‘But—’ the young man began.

“‘You can take it or leave it,’ retorted Gobseck, handing the jewels back to the countess. ‘I have to take too many chances.’”

“‘You would do better to throw yourself on your husband’s mercy,’ I whispered in her ear, leaning toward her.

“‘The usurer doubtless understood what I said by the movement of my lips and glanced coldly at me. The young man’s face became livid. The countess’s indecision was evident. The count approached her, and, although he spoke very low, I heard him say:

“‘Adieu, dear Anastasie, be happy! For my own part, to-morrow I shall be free from care.’”

“‘Monsieur,’ cried the young woman, turning to Gobseck, ‘I accept your offer.’”

“‘Well, well!’ retorted the old man; ‘you’re a hard one to confess, my dear madame.’”

“‘He signed a draft on the Bank for fifty thousand francs and handed it to the countess.

“‘Now,’ he said, with a smile that was the counterpart of Voltaire’s, ‘I will make up the amount with thirty thousand francs in notes of hand, whose genuineness will not be disputed. They’re as good as gold in ingots. Monsieur just said to me: “My

notes will be paid,"' he added, handing out certain documents signed by the count, all protested the day before at the request of that one of his fellow-usurers who had, in all probability, sold them to him at a discount.

"The young man emitted a roar, in the midst of which could be distinguished the words: 'Old rascal!' Papa Gobseck did not wink; he produced a pair of pistols from a box and coolly observed:

"'As the insulted party, I will fire first.'

"'Maxime, you owe monsieur an apology,' said the trembling countess, in a soft voice.

"'I had no intention of insulting you,' stammered the count.

"'I know that very well,' replied Gobseck calmly, 'your intention was simply not to pay your notes.'

"The countess rose, bowed and disappeared, horrified beyond measure, I have no doubt. Monsieur de Trailles had no choice but to follow her; but before he left the room, he said:

"'Any indiscretion on your part, messieurs, and I will have your blood, or you shall have mine.'

"'Amen!' replied Gobseck, putting away his pistols. 'In order to stake your blood, my boy, you must have some of the article, and you've nothing but mud in your veins.'

*

“When the door was closed and the two carriages had driven away, Gobseck jumped out of his chair and began to dance around the room, shouting:

“‘I have the diamonds! I have the diamonds! and such beautiful diamonds! and not dear. Aha! Werbrust and Gigonnet, you thought you could catch old Papa Gobseck! *Ego sum papa!* I am the master of all of you! Paid in full! How sheepish they’ll be to-night when I tell them the story between two games of dominoes!’

“This sombre joy, this barbaric ferocity, aroused by the possession of a few white pebbles, made me shudder. I was stupefied and speechless.

“‘Aha! there you are, my boy,’ said he. ‘We’ll dine together. We’ll have a jolly time at your house, for I don’t keep house. All these restaurant fellows would poison the devil with their gravies and sauces and wines.’

“The expression of my face suddenly restored his cold impassibility.

“‘You can’t imagine this,’ he said, sitting down by the hearth, and placing his tin saucepan filled with milk on the chafing dish.—‘Will you breakfast with me?’ he continued. ‘There may possibly be enough for two.’

“‘Thanks,’ I replied, ‘I don’t breakfast until noon.’

“At that moment, hurried steps were heard in the corridor. The new arrival stopped on Gobseck’s landing and struck several blows upon his door, so violent as to indicate great excitement. The usurer went and looked through the wicket, and at once admitted a man about thirty-five years of age, who seemed harmless to him no doubt, notwithstanding his wrath. He was simply dressed and resembled the late Duc de Richelieu; it was the count, whom you must have met, and who had—forgive the expression—the aristocratic bearing of the statesmen of your faubourg.

“‘Monsieur,’ he said, addressing Gobseck, who was himself once more, ‘has my wife been here?’

“‘Possibly.’

“‘Come, come, monsieur, don’t you understand me?’

“‘I haven’t the honor of knowing madame your wife,’ the usurer replied. ‘I have received many people this morning: women, men, young ladies who resemble young men, and young men who resemble young ladies. It would be a difficult matter for me to—’

“‘A truce to pleasantries, monsieur! I am speaking of the lady who left you a moment ago.’

“‘How can I tell whether she is your wife,’ demanded the usurer, ‘I have never had the pleasure of seeing you?’

“‘You are wrong, Monsieur Gobseck,’ said the count in a tone of the most profound irony. ‘We met in my wife’s room one morning. You had in

your possession a note signed by her, a note she didn't owe.'

" 'It was none of my business to inquire in what way she had received the consideration for it,' replied Gobseck, with a cunning glance at the count. 'I had discounted it for one of my confrères. However, monsieur,' said the capitalist, without excitement and without quickening his utterance, pouring coffee into his bowl of milk as he spoke, 'you will permit me to remark that you haven't established your right to remonstrate with me: I have been of age since the year sixty-one of the last century.'

" 'Monsieur, you have just purchased, at an absurdly low price, family diamonds that don't belong to my wife.'

" 'Without admitting any obligation on my part to let you into the secrets of my business, I will say to you, Monsieur le Comte, that if your diamonds have been taken by Madame la Comtesse, you should have sent a circular to all jewelers warning them not to buy; she may have sold them at retail.'

" 'Monsieur,' cried the count, 'you know my wife!'

" 'True.'

" 'She is under the control of her husband.'

" 'Possibly.'

" 'She hadn't the right to dispose of those diamonds—'

" 'True.'

" 'Well, monsieur?'

" 'Well, monsieur, I know your wife, she is under

her husband's control, she is under many controls; but—I—do not—know—your diamonds. If Madame la Comtesse signs notes, she may engage in business of course, buy diamonds, sell them on commission—such things have been.'

"'Adieu, monsieur!' cried the count, pale with wrath; 'there are courts of law!'

"'True.'

"'This gentleman here,' he added, pointing to me, 'was a witness to the sale.'

"'Possibly.'

"The count was about to leave the room. Suddenly, realizing the importance of the affair, I interposed between the belligerent parties.

"'Monsieur le Comte,' I said, 'you are right, and Monsieur Gobseck is not at fault. You could not proceed against the purchaser without making your wife a party to the suit, and the odium of the affair would not fall on her alone. I am a solicitor, I owe it to myself even more than to my official position, to say to you that the diamonds were purchased by Monsieur Gobseck in my presence; but I think you would make a mistake to contest the legality of the sale, the subject-matter of which, by the way, is not easily identified. In equity, you would be right; in law you would be worsted. Monsieur Gobseck is too honest a man to deny that this sale results in profit to him, especially when my conscience and my duty force me to confess it. But, if you should bring suit, Monsieur le Comte, the result would be doubtful. I advise you therefore

to compromise with Monsieur Gobseck, who can allege his good faith in the matter as a defence, and to whom you would in any event have to repay the amount he has paid. Agree to redeem the diamonds in seven or eight months, or a year, whatever time will enable you to return the sum borrowed by Madame la Comtesse, unless you prefer to redeem them to-day by giving sufficient security for the payment.'

"The usurer dipped his bread in his cup and ate with an air of perfect indifference; when I spoke of compromise he looked at me as if he would have said: 'The rascal! how he profits by my lessons!' For my part, I retorted with a glance that he understood perfectly. It was a very shady, dubious piece of business; it had become essential to make some compromise. Gobseck wouldn't have had the expedient of denial to fall back upon, for I should have told the truth. The count thanked me with a grateful smile. After a discussion in which Gobseck exhibited such cupidity and adroitness as would have triumphed over all the diplomacy of a peace congress, I drew up a document wherein the count acknowledged the receipt of eighty-five thousand francs, interest included, from the usurer, upon the repayment of which sum, Gobseck bound himself to turn over the diamonds to the count.

"'What reckless waste!' cried the husband as he signed the paper. 'How can I throw a bridge over this chasm?'

"'Monsieur,' said Gobseck gravely, 'have you many children?'

"This question made the count flinch, as if, like a skilful physician, the usurer had suddenly placed his finger on the seat of the disorder. The husband made no reply.

" 'I know your story by heart,' continued Gobseck, understanding the count's pained silence. 'That woman is a demon whom you still love perhaps; I can believe it, for she moved me. Perhaps you would like to rescue your fortune, and keep it for one or two of your children. Very good; plunge into the whirlpool of society, gamble, lose your fortune, and come often to see Gobseck. The world will say I am a Jew, an Arab, a usurer, a corsair, and have ruined you! I snap my fingers at them! If I am insulted, I bring my man down, for no one is handier with sword and pistol than your humble servant. People know it! Then have a friend ready, if you can find one, to whom you can make a fictitious transfer of your property.—Don't you call that a valid trust?' he asked, turning to me.

"The count seemed entirely absorbed by his thoughts, and left us, saying:

" 'You shall have your money to-morrow, monsieur; have the diamonds ready.'

" 'That fellow seems to me as big a fool as most honest men,' said Gobseck, coolly, when the count had gone.

" 'Say rather as big a fool as most passionate men.'

" 'The count owes you for drawing the agreement,' he cried, as I took my leave.

"Some days after this scene, which had given me

an insight into the ghastly mysteries of the life of a woman of fashion, the count walked into my office one morning.

“‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘I have come to consult you upon certain matters of serious importance, and I desire to say that I have the utmost confidence in you—of that fact I hope to give you convincing proofs. Your conduct toward Madame de Grandlieu is beyond all praise.’— “You see, madame,” said Derville to the viscountess, “that I have received my fee from you for a very modest service a thousand times over.”—

“I bowed respectfully and replied that I had simply performed an honest man’s duty.

“‘Well, monsieur,’ continued the count, ‘I have picked up considerable information touching the extraordinary individual to whom you owe your start in your profession. From all I know of him I recognize in Gobseck a philosopher of the cynic school. What do you think of his honesty?’

“‘Monsieur le Comte,’ I replied, ‘Gobseck is my benefactor—at fifteen per cent,’ I added, laughingly. ‘But his avarice doesn’t justify me in painting his portrait for the benefit of a stranger.’

“‘Say on, monsieur! your frankness can do neither Gobseck nor yourself any harm. I don’t expect to find an angel disguised as a pawnbroker.’

“‘Papa Gobseck,’ I rejoined, ‘is thoroughly permeated with a principle which guides his conduct. In his view, money is merchandise which may be sold cheap or dear, as the case may be, with a clear

conscience. In his eyes, a capitalist is a man who, by the high rate of interest he demands for his money, becomes a partner by anticipation in lucrative enterprises and speculations. Aside from his financial principles and his philosophical observations upon human nature, which make it possible for him to play the usurer in appearance, I am firmly convinced that, when he throws off all thought of business he is the most scrupulous and upright man in Paris. There are two men in him: he is a miser and a philosopher, small and great. If I should die and leave children behind me, he would be their guardian. That, monsieur, is the light in which experience has taught me to look at Gobseck. I know nothing of his past life. He may have been a corsair, he may have traveled the whole world over, dealing in diamonds or men, women or state secrets; but I can swear that no human soul has been more thoroughly tried and tested. The day I carried him the money that squared my account with him, I asked him, not without some oratorical precautions, what feeling it was that led him to make me pay such exorbitant interest, and why, as long as he was willing to oblige me, he didn't yield to the impulse to be wholly generous.

““My son, I relieved you from the obligation of gratitude by giving you the right to think that you owe me nothing.”

““So we are the best friends in the world. That reply of his, monsieur, will show you the man better than all the words in the language.”

“‘My mind is irrevocably made up,’ said the count. ‘Prepare the necessary documents to convey to Gobseck the possessory title to my property. I rely upon you, monsieur, and upon you alone, to draw up a defeasance for him to sign, declaring that the sale is a nominal one, and binding himself to restore my fortune—to be managed by him meanwhile as he knows how to manage capital—to my eldest son, when he comes of age. Now, monsieur, I must tell you this: I am afraid to keep that important document in my house. My son’s attachment to his mother makes me afraid to entrust the defeasance to him. Might I venture to beg you to take charge of it? In case of his death, Gobseck will bequeath my property to you. Thus, you see, every contingency is provided for.’

“The count was silent for a moment and seemed much agitated.

“‘A thousand pardons, monsieur,’ he resumed. ‘I suffer a great deal of pain and my health causes me much anxiety. Recent troubles have imposed a cruel burden upon me and made it necessary for me to take this momentous step.’

“‘Monsieur,’ I said, ‘permit me to thank you first of all for your confidence in me. But I must justify it by calling your attention to the fact that by this transaction, you altogether disinherit your—other children. They bear your name. If for no other reason than because they are the children of a woman once loved, though now fallen from grace, they are entitled to some provision. I am compelled

to say that I will not accept the trust with which you are pleased to honor me, unless their future is provided for.'

"These words startled the count tremendously. Tears came to his eyes and he pressed my hand warmly.

" 'I don't fully know you yet,' he said. 'You have caused me a feeling of joy and of pain at the same moment. We will arrange the shares of those children by the terms of the defeasance.'

"I walked with him as far as the door of my office, and it seemed to me that his face wore a happier expression, due to the satisfaction caused by this act of justice.

"You see, Camille, how it is that young women fall into bottomless pits. Sometimes a contradance, a song at the piano, a party in the country is enough to cause horrible misery. They rush to their doom at the presumptuous bidding of vanity or pride, on the faith of a smile, or through mere folly or frivolity! Shame, Remorse and Misery are three Furies into whose hands women inevitably fall as soon as they pass the bounds of—"

"Poor Camille is dead with sleep," the viscountess interposed.—"Come, my dear, go to bed; your heart needs no ghastly pictures to keep it pure and virtuous."

Camille understood her mother and left the room.

"You went a little too far, dear Monsieur Der-ville," said the viscountess; "solicitors are neither mothers nor preachers."

"But the newspapers are a thousand times more—"

"Poor Derville!" the viscountess interrupted him again, "I shouldn't know you. Pray, do you suppose my daughter reads the newspapers?—Go on," she added after a pause.

"Three months after the execution of the conveyance from the count for the benefit of Gobseck—"

"You can call him the Comte de Restaud as my daughter isn't here," said the viscountess.

"Very well!" said the solicitor. "Some time after that scene I had not received the defeasance which was to remain in my custody. At Paris, solicitors are carried along by a current that doesn't permit them to take any greater degree of interest in a client's affairs than he takes himself, barring some exceptional cases which we know how to distinguish. One day, however, when the usurer was dining with me, I asked him, as we left the table, if he knew why I had heard nothing more from Monsieur de Restaud.

"There are excellent reasons for that," he replied. "The gentleman is at death's door. He is one of those tender-hearted creatures who don't know how to kill grief and so always allow themselves to be killed by it. Life is a profession, a trade which one must take the trouble to learn. When a man has learned what life is, by dint of having experienced its sorrows, his fibres knit together and acquire a certain elasticity which enables him to govern his sensitiveness; each nerve

becomes a sort of steel spring, that bends without breaking; a man thus fortified, if his stomach is sound, ought to live as long as the cedars of Lebanon, which are famous trees.'

" 'Is the count dying?' I asked.

" 'Possibly,' said Gobseck. 'You'll have a fat job settling his estate.'

"I looked my man in the eye and said to him, to sound him:

" 'Tell me why it is that the count and myself are the only beings in whom you are interested?'

" 'Because you are the only beings who ever trusted me without shuffling,' he replied.

"Although this reply gave me reason to think that Gobseck would not take unfair advantage of his position if the defeasance were lost, I determined to see the count. I pretended to have some business to attend to, and we went out. I was not long in reaching Rue du Helder. I was shown into a salon where the countess was playing with her children. When my name was announced she rose abruptly, came forward to meet me, and sat down without a word, waving me to a vacant chair near the fire. She assumed the impenetrable mask beneath which women of the world can so completely conceal their passions. Her face was already worn and faded by chagrin; only the marvelous outlines that formerly constituted its chief merit, remained to testify to her beauty.

" 'It is very necessary, madame, that I should speak with Monsieur le Comte—'

“‘In that case, you will be more highly favored than myself,’ she interrupted. ‘Monsieur de Restaud refuses to see anyone, he will hardly allow his physician to visit him, and repels all attention, even from me. Invalids have such strange whims!—they’re like children, they don’t know what they want.’

“‘Perhaps, like children, they know very well what they want.’

“The countess blushed. I almost repented having made this reply, worthy of Gobseck himself.

“‘But it is impossible, madame,’ I continued, to turn the conversation into a different channel, ‘that Monsieur de Restaud remains alone all the time.’

“‘He has his eldest son with him,’ said she.

“It was in vain that I gazed at the countess; that time she didn’t blush, and it seemed to me that she had strengthened her resolution not to allow me to fathom her secrets.

“‘You must understand, madame, that this is not mere impertinence on my part,’ I said. ‘My action is based upon important interests—’

“I bit my lips, conscious that I was sailing on the wrong tack. The countess instantly took advantage of my stupidity.

“‘My interests are identical with my husband’s, monsieur,’ said she. ‘There is no reason why you should not tell me your business—’

“‘The matter that brings me here concerns Monsieur le Comte alone,’ I replied firmly.

“‘I will send word to him of your desire to see him.’

“The smooth tone in which she uttered these words and the expression that accompanied them did not deceive me; I felt certain that she would never allow me to gain access to her husband. I talked for a moment on indifferent subjects to have an opportunity to watch the countess; but, like all women who have determined upon a plan of action, she had acquired the art of dissimulating with that rare perfection, which, in your sex, is the last degree of perfidy. Shall I venture to say it, I believed her capable of anything, even a crime. This feeling was due to a glimpse of the future revealed in her gestures, her expression, her manners, and even in the inflection of her voice. I left her.—”



“Now, I propose to describe the scenes that closed this episode, adding thereto certain circumstances that time has revealed to me, and the details that Gobseck’s perspicacity or my own enabled me to divine. At the time when the Comte de Restaud seemed to have plunged into a perfect whirlpool of dissipation and to be bent upon squandering his fortune, there were scenes between the husband and wife, the secret of which was never divulged, but which compelled the count to judge his wife even more unfavorably than he had hitherto done. As soon as he fell sick and was obliged to take to his bed, his aversion to the countess and her two younger children became manifest; he forbade their entering his room, and when they tried to evade that order, their disobedience threw Monsieur de Restaud into such alarming paroxysms, that the doctor besought the countess not to disregard her husband’s injunctions. Madame de Restaud, when she had seen the country-houses, the family estates and the very house in which she lived pass into the hands of Gobseck—who seemed, so far as their fortune was concerned, to be performing the functions of one of those fabulous personages called ogres—doubtless understood her husband’s plans. Monsieur de Trailles, being somewhat too closely pursued by his creditors, was traveling in England at

this time. He alone could have informed the countess of the secret precautions against her, suggested by Gobseck to Monsieur de Restaud. They say that she refused for a long while to affix her signature, which under our law was necessary to give validity to the sale of the property, and yet the count obtained it. The countess thought that her husband was turning everything into cash, and that the little package of notes representing it, would be safely hidden away, at a notary's or perhaps at the Bank. According to her reckoning, Monsieur de Restaud must necessarily have in his possession a document of some sort to make it possible for his eldest son to recover those pieces of property which he had not parted with. She therefore adopted the plan of keeping the strictest watch all about her husband's room. She ruled the household with a rod of iron and subjected everybody to her wifely espionage. She sat all day long in the salon adjoining her husband's room, where she could hear his slightest movement and his every word. At night a bed was made up for her in that room, and most of the time she did not sleep. The doctor was entirely in her interest. Her devotion seemed worthy of all admiration. She knew how to disguise Monsieur de Restaud's manifest repugnance to her, with the innate shrewdness of perfidious persons, and feigned grief so perfectly, that she acquired a sort of celebrity in that line. Some prudish souls went so far as to say that she thereby atoned for her past errors. But she had always before her

eyes the destitution that awaited her at the count's death, if she should be wanting in presence of mind. And so this woman, driven away from the bed of pain upon which her husband lay groaning, had drawn a magic circle around it. Away from him, yet near him, disgraced yet omnipotent, to all appearance a devoted wife, she watched for the coming of death and fortune, like the insect of the fields, which, at the foot of the sand precipice it has cleverly constructed and rounded off, lies in wait for its inevitable prey, listening to each grain of dust that falls. The most severe censor could but admit that the countess was an ideal mother. Her father's death taught her a lesson, so they say. She idolized her children and had kept the picture of her disorderly life hidden from their eyes; their extreme youth made it possible for her to attain her object and to win their love; she gave them the best and most brilliant education possible. I confess that I cannot avoid a feeling of admiration for the woman, and a sort of compassion upon which Gobseck jokes me still. At this time the countess, who realized Maxime's baseness, was expiating the errors of her past life by tears of blood. I believe it. Hateful as were the steps she took to obtain possession of her husband's fortune, were they not dictated by her maternal love and by the desire to undo the wrong she had done her children? Again, like many women who have passed through the tempests of passion, she may have felt the need of becoming virtuous once more. Perhaps, she didn't

realize the worth of virtue until the moment that she reaped the deplorable harvest sown by her errors. Every time that young Ernest came from his father's room, he underwent a searching examination as to everything the count had said or done. The child gladly gratified his mother's curiosity which he attributed to affectionate solicitude, and often anticipated her questions. My visit was like a ray of light to the countess, who chose to look upon me as the minister of the count's vengeance, and determined not to let me approach the dying man. Impelled by a presentiment of evil, I was extremely anxious to procure an interview with Monsieur de Restaud, for I was somewhat disturbed as to the fate of the defeasance; if it should fall into the countess's hands, she might make use of it, and it would cause interminable litigation between her and Gobseck. I knew the usurer well enough to feel sure that he would never restore the property to the countess, and there were numerous opportunities for invoking technicalities in the phraseology of the document, which no one but myself was in a position to take advantage of. I was anxious to prevent such a succession of disasters, and I called upon the countess a second time.

"I have noticed, madame," said Derville to the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu in a confidential tone, "that there are certain moral phenomena to which we don't pay sufficient attention in society. Being naturally of an observing turn of mind, I carry into the important cases in which I am engaged, cases in

which the passions are brought actively into play, a habit of instinctive analysis. Now I have always noticed with ever-recurring surprise and admiration that the secret purposes and ideas which two adversaries have in their minds, are almost always reciprocally divined. We sometimes find between two bitter enemies the same lucid interchange of thoughts, the same power of mental vision as between two lovers who read each other's hearts. So, when we were face to face, the countess and myself, I suddenly understood the cause of her antipathy to me, although she disguised her feelings beneath a cloak of perfect courtesy and amiability. I was a confidant forced upon her, and it is impossible for a woman to avoid hating a man before whom she is compelled to blush. As for her, she reasoned that, if I were the man in whom her husband placed his confidence, he had not yet made over his fortune to me. Our conversation, which I will not inflict upon you, has remained in my memory as one of the most perilous battles I have ever fought. The countess, endowed by nature with the requisite qualities for exerting an irresistible power of fascination, was in turn yielding, haughty, caressing, confiding; she even went so far as to try and kindle my curiosity and awaken passion in my heart in order to gain control over me; she failed. When I took leave, I detected in her eyes a gleam of rage and hatred that made me tremble. We parted foes. She would have liked to be able to crush me, and I felt compassion for her,—a sentiment which, to

certain natures, is equivalent to a deadly insult. This sentiment was manifest in the last suggestions I offered. I left her, I think, with profound terror in her heart, telling her that, whatever course she chose to adopt, she would necessarily be ruined.

“‘If I should see Monsieur le Comte, the welfare of your children at least—’

“‘I should be at your mercy,’ she retorted, interrupting me with a gesture of disgust.

“Once the issue was so frankly joined between us, I resolved to rescue the family from the misery in store for them. Having determined to resort to measures of doubtful legality, if such were necessary to attain my object, I prepared for the struggle in this way. I caused suit to be brought against Monsieur de Restaud for a sum alleged to be due Gobseck, and I obtained judgment. The countess necessarily concealed this procedure from her husband, but I thereby acquired the right to have seals placed upon his property in case of his death. I next bribed one of the servants of the family, and obtained from him a promise that, when his master was at the point of death, he would come and let me know, even if it were in the middle of the night, so that I might appear on the scene at once, terrify the countess by threatening her with a speedy application of the seals, and thus save the defeasance. I learned later that that woman studied up the Code while she was listening to her dying husband’s groans. What horrible pictures would be presented by the minds of those who stand around the beds of

the dying, if their ideas could be put upon canvas! And money is always the motive of the schemes that are concocted, the plans that are formed, the intrigues that are set on foot! Let us leave these details, which are necessarily wearisome, but may have enabled you to realize the sufferings of this woman and her husband, and which tear the veil from the secrets of some households like theirs.

“For two months the Comte de Restaud, resigned to his fate, lay in bed, alone, in his chamber. A mortal disease had slowly weakened his body and his mind. He indulged in the caprices characteristic of invalids, which seem absolutely inexplicable in their extravagance; he was strenuously opposed to having his room cleaned, refused every sort of attention and would not even allow his bed to be made. This extreme apathy was manifest in all his surroundings; the furniture of his room was in disorder, and the most delicate objects were covered with dust and cobwebs. Once refined and luxurious in his tastes, he seemed now to take pleasure in the depressing spectacle presented by his apartment, where the mantel, the secretary and the chairs were heaped up with the necessary accompaniments of disease: vials full or empty, and almost all dirty; strips of linen, broken plates, a warming-pan open in front of the fire, a bath still filled with mineral water. The genius of destruction was apparent in every detail of this disgraceful chaos. Death appeared in inanimate things before attacking the animate being. The count had a horror of the

light, the blinds at his windows were closed, and the half-darkness enhanced the gloom of this depressing spot. The invalid had grown much thinner. His eyes, where life seemed to have taken refuge, were still bright. The livid pallor of his face had something ghastly about it, and was made still more so by the extraordinary length of his hair, which he had refused to have cut, and which hung down beside his cheeks in long, dank locks. He resembled the wild-looking denizens of the desert. Sorrow had extinguished all human sentiments in this man, who was barely fifty years old, and whom all Paris had known as one of the most brilliant and fortunate of men.

"One morning, early in the month of December, 1824, he looked up at his son Ernest, who was sitting at the foot of the bed, gazing at him with a sorrowful expression.

" 'Are you in pain?' the young viscount asked him.

" 'No!' he said with a ghastly smile: 'it's all *here and around my heart!*'

"And he pointed to his head, then pressed his shrunken fingers against his wasted breast, with a gesture that brought the tears to Ernest's eyes.

" 'Why doesn't Monsieur Derville come?' he asked his valet, whom he believed to be deeply attached to himself, but who was, in fact, wholly in the countess's interest.—'Look you, Maurice,' cried the dying man, and he sat up in bed, having apparently recovered all his mental faculties—'I've sent you to my solicitor seven or eight times within

a fortnight, and he hasn't come yet! Do you think you can make a fool of me? Go to him at once, instantly, and bring him here. If you don't carry out my orders, I will get up and go myself—'

" 'Madame,' said the valet, leaving the room, 'you heard what Monsieur le Comte said; what am I to do?'

" 'You must make a pretence of going to summon the solicitor, and then come back and tell monsieur that he has gone forty leagues from Paris on an important case. You can say also that he is expected to return at the end of the week.—Invalids never realize their condition,' thought the countess, 'and he will await the man's return.'

"The doctor had declared the night before that the count could hardly live through the day. When the valet returned two hours later and gave his master the hopeless answer dictated by the countess, the dying man seemed intensely agitated.

" 'My God! my God!' he exclaimed several times, 'in Thee alone do I place my trust.'

"He gazed at his son for a long while, and said to him at last in a feeble voice:

" 'Ernest, my boy, you are very young, but you have a brave heart, and of course you understand the sacredness of a promise made to a dying man, a father—Do you think you are capable of keeping a secret, of burying it in your own heart so that your mother herself won't suspect it? To-day, my son, you are the only person in this house that I can trust. You won't betray my confidence?'

“‘No, father.’

“‘Very well; Ernest, in a few moments I will hand you a sealed package belonging to Monsieur Derville; you must keep it so hidden that nobody will know you have it in your possession; you must get away from the house and put it in the post-box at the end of the street.’

“‘Yes, father.’

“‘I can rely on you?’

“‘Yes, father.’

“‘Come and kiss me. You make death less bitter to me, my dear child. In six or seven years, you will realize the importance of this secret, and then you will be well rewarded for your adroitness and fidelity, then you will know how dearly I love you. Leave me alone a moment and don’t let anybody—no matter who it is—come into the room.’

“Ernest went out and found his mother standing in the salon.

“‘Ernest,’ she said, ‘come here.’

“She sat down, taking her son between her knees, strained him to her heart and kissed him.

“‘Ernest, your father has just been talking to you.’

“‘Yes, mamma.’

“‘What did he say?’

“‘I can’t repeat it, mamma.’

“‘Oh! my dear child,’ cried the countess, embracing him passionately, ‘how overjoyed I am at your discretion! Always tell the truth and always

be true to your promise—those are two maxims you must never forget.’

“‘Oh! how lovely you are, mamma! You never told a lie, I know!’

“‘Sometimes I have, dear Ernest. Yes, I have broken my word under circumstances to which all laws have to give way. Listen, Ernest, you are old enough and bright enough to see that your father repels me and won’t allow me to care for him; that isn’t natural, for you know how much I love him.’

“‘Yes, mamma.’

“‘My poor child,’ said the countess weeping, ‘this wretched state of affairs is the result of treacherous insinuations. Wicked people have tried to separate your father and myself for the purpose of satisfying their greed. They want to deprive us of our fortune and appropriate it themselves. If your father were well, the present division between us would soon cease to exist and he would listen to me; and, as he is kind and affectionate, he would realize his error; but his reason is impaired, and his prejudices against me have become a fixed idea, a sort of mania, the effect of his disease. Your father’s excessive affection for you is still another proof of the disordered condition of his mind. You never noticed before he was sick that he cared less for Pauline and Georges than for you. Everything is caprice with him now. His affection for you might suggest to him the idea of giving you orders to execute. If you don’t want to ruin your family, my dear angel, and to see your mother begging her

bread some day like a pauper, you must tell her everything—'

" 'Aha!' cried the count who had opened the door and suddenly appeared, almost naked, and already as withered and bony as a skeleton.

"This hoarse exclamation produced a terrible effect upon the countess, who sat speechless, as if paralyzed with horror. Her husband was so pale and thin that he seemed to have come forth from the grave.

" 'You have steeped my life in misery and now you seek to disturb my last moments, to pervert my son's mind and make a wicked man of him!' he cried in a hollow voice.

"The countess threw herself at the feet of the dying man, made almost hideous by this final outburst of excitement, and her tears flowed in torrents.

" 'Mercy! mercy!' she cried.

" 'Have you had any mercy on me?' he demanded. 'I allowed you to devour your own fortune, do you want now to do the same by mine and ruin my son?'

" 'Show me no mercy, then, be inflexible to me!' said she, 'but the children? Condemn your widow to live in a convent, and I will obey; I will do whatever you choose to demand to atone for the wrong I have done you; but let the children be happy! Oh! the children! the children!'

" 'I have but one child,' retorted the count, holding out his wasted arms to his son, with a despairing gesture.

“‘Pardon! I repent, I repent!’—cried the countess, kissing her husband’s clammy feet.

“Sobs choked her utterance and only vague, incoherent words issued from her parched throat.

“‘After what you were just saying to Ernest, you dare talk of repentance!’ said the moribund, overturning the countess with a movement of his foot. —‘You freeze me!’ he added with indifference, in which there was something frightful to see. ‘You have been a bad girl, a bad wife, and you’ll be a bad mother—’

“The wretched woman lay on the floor in a swoon. The dying man went back to his bed, lay down, and lost consciousness some hours after. The priests came to administer the sacraments. It was midnight when he breathed his last. The scene of the morning had exhausted his remaining strength. I arrived at midnight with Papa Gobseck. Under cover of the confusion that prevailed, we made our way to the small salon adjoining the chamber of death, where we found the three children in tears, with two priests who had passed the night beside the body. Ernest came to me and said that his mother wished to be alone in the count’s room.

“‘Don’t go in,’ he said with an accent and a gesture that were equally touching, ‘she begs you not to!’

“Gobseck began to laugh—that silent laugh which was his peculiar property. I was too deeply moved by the intense feeling displayed upon Ernest’s face, to share the miser’s sarcasm. When

the child saw us walking toward the door, he ran and threw himself against it, crying:

“ ‘Mamma, here are some black gentlemen coming after you!’

“Gobseck lifted the child out of the way as if he had been a feather, and opened the door. What a spectacle was presented to our gaze! Frightful confusion reigned in the chamber. Disheveled, desperate, her eyes gleaming with excitement, the countess stood, dumfounded, amid a confused heap of clothes, papers and trinkets. The disorder was simply frightful, in presence of the dead. The breath had hardly left the count's body before his wife had forced open all the drawers and the secretary; the carpet at her feet was strewn with wreckage, several pieces of furniture and portfolios had been broken, everything bore the marks of her audacious hands. If her search had been fruitless at first, her attitude and her excitement led me to think that she had finally discovered the mysterious papers. I cast a glance at the bed, and with the instinct born of long experience in business, I guessed what had taken place. The count's body lay in the passage between the bed and the wall, almost across it, with his face turned toward the bed, contemptuously tossed there like one of the envelopes that littered the floor; nor was he more than a useless envelope. The rigid inflexibility of the limbs gave the body a grotesquely horrible aspect. The dying man had concealed the defeasance under his pillow, without doubt, as if to shield it against

attack as long as he lived. The countess had divined her husband's thought, which seemed, indeed, to be expressed in his last gesture, in the convulsive movement of the bent fingers. The pillow had been thrown under the bed; it still bore the mark of the countess's foot; on the floor in front of her I spied a paper sealed in several places with the count's crest; I hastily picked it up and read upon it a superscription to the effect that the contents were to be handed to me. I gazed earnestly at the countess with the keen severity of a judge questioning a culprit. Papers were burning on the hearth. When she heard us coming the countess had thrown them there, believing, after reading the first provisions in favor of her children, which I had been instrumental in procuring, that she was destroying a will that deprived them of their fortune. A tormented conscience, and the involuntary terror a crime inspires in the person who commits it, had taken away all power of reflection. When she saw that she was taken *in flagrante delicto* she caught a glimpse, perhaps, of the scaffold, and felt the executioner's red-hot iron.

"She awaited our first words, gasping for breath, and watched us with haggard eyes.

"'Ah! madame,' I said, taking from the hearth a fragment that the fire had not touched, 'you have ruined your children! these papers were their muni-ments of title.'

"Her lips moved as if she were going to have an attack of paralysis.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed Gobseck, his voice producing the effect upon us of a copper candlestick, grinding upon marble.

"After a pause the old man said to me in a calm voice:

" 'Do you mean to give Madame la Comtesse to understand that I am not the lawful owner of the property Monsieur le Comte sold me? This house has belonged to me since his death.'

"A sudden blow on the head with a club would have caused me less pain and surprise. The countess noticed the hesitating glance I cast upon the usurer.

" 'Monsieur, monsieur!' she said to him, unable to utter another word.

" 'You took the property in trust?' I asked.

" 'Possibly.'

" 'Do you propose to take an unfair advantage of the crime committed by madame?'

" 'Exactly.'

"I went out of the room leaving the countess sitting beside her husband's bed, weeping hot tears. Gobseck followed me. When we were in the street, I left him; but he came up to me, gazed at me with one of those searching looks with which he probes men's hearts, and said to me, in his piping voice, which took on for the occasion a piercing quality:

" 'So you undertake to pass judgment on me, do you?'

"After that we saw but little of each other. Gobseck let the count's town-house, and he has passed every summer on the estates in the country,

playing the great lord, laying out farms, repairing mills and roads, and planting trees. One day I met him in one of the paths at the Tuileries.

“ ‘The countess is leading a heroic life,’ I said. ‘She has devoted herself to the education of her children and is bringing them up in unexceptionable fashion. The oldest boy is a fine fellow—’

“ ‘Possibly.’

“ ‘But,’ I continued, ‘oughtn’t you to help Ernest along?’

“ ‘Help Ernest!’ cried Gobseck. ‘No, no! Adversity is our greatest teacher; adversity will teach him the value of money, and of men and women. Let him sail his boat on the Parisian sea! when he’s got to be a good pilot, we’ll give him a ship.’

“I left him without seeking an explanation of the meaning of his words. Although Monsieur de Restaud, in whom his mother had inspired a feeling of repugnance to me, is very far from taking me for his confidant, I went last week to Gobseck’s house to inform him of Ernest’s affection for Mademoiselle Camille, and beg him to carry out the count’s instructions, as the young count is approaching his majority. The old money-lender had been confined to his bed for a long time, suffering from the disease that was destined to carry him off. He postponed his reply until he should be able to get up and attend to business, his purpose without doubt being to keep his clutches upon everything so long as there was a breath of life in his body; his dilatory reply had no other motive. As I found him much

sicker than he supposed, I stayed by his side long enough to realize the progress made by a passion which old age had converted into a sort of mania. In order to be absolutely alone in the house where he lived, he had hired the whole house and left all the other rooms unoccupied. Nothing was changed in his own quarters. The furniture I had known so well for sixteen years looked as if it had been kept under glass, it was so exactly the same as always. His faithful old concierge, married to a veteran who looked after the lodge, while she was in attendance on the master, was still his housekeeper, his confidential servant, the introducer of everybody who came to see him, and performed all the functions of nurse. Despite his enfeebled state, Gobseck still received his customers and his income, and had so systematized his business that by sending his veteran to a few places it could be done outside. At the time of the treaty by which France recognized the independence of Hayti, the information Gobseck possessed as to the condition of the former great fortunes at San Domingo, and as to the colonists or their assignees to whom indemnity was payable, led to his being appointed a member of the commission constituted to adjust their claims and to divide the funds to be paid by Hayti. Gobseck's inventive genius resulted in the creation of an agency to discount the claims of the colonists or their heirs, in the names of Werbrust and Gigonnet, with whom he divided the profits without having to advance any money, for his knowledge of the subject was

his contribution to the capital. This agency was a sort of distillery in which the claims of fools and doubters, or of those whose titles might be contested, were passed through the press. As official adjuster, Gobseck was in a position to negotiate with the large landowners, who, in some cases to secure the appraisal of their claims on a high scale, in others to secure their speedy approval, offered him presents in proportion to their means. These presents constituted a sort of commission on the sums which it was impossible for him to get into his hands, while his agency raked in at a low price all the small and doubtful claims and those of people who preferred immediate payment, however insignificant the sum might be, to taking the risk of payment by the republic. Thus Gobseck was the insatiable boa-constrictor of this great affair. Every morning he received his perquisites and looked them over as the minister of a nabob might have done before making up his mind to sign a pardon. Gobseck took everything, from the poor devil's game-basket to the scrupulous man's pound of candles, from the rich man's silver plate to the speculator's gold snuff-box. No one knew what became of the things that were given the old usurer. Everything went into his house, nothing came out.

"'On an honest woman's word,' said the concierge, an old acquaintance of mine, 'I think he swallows it all without growing any fatter for it, for he's as lean and skinny as the bird on my clock.'

"Finally—it was last Monday—he sent for me by

the veteran, who caught me just as I was going into my office.

“ ‘Come quick, Monsieur Derville, the master’s going to settle his accounts; he’s as yellow as a lemon, and he’s impatient to speak to you; death’s at work at him and his death-rattle is rumbling round in his windpipe.’ ”

“When I entered the dying man’s room, I surprised him on his knees in front of the hearth, where there was no fire, but an enormous heap of ashes. Gobseck had dragged himself thither from his bed; but he hadn’t the strength to go back nor voice enough to call for help.

“ ‘My old friend,’ I said, lifting him up and helping him back to the bed, ‘you’re cold; why don’t you have a fire?’ ”

“ ‘I’m not cold,’ he said; ‘no fire! no fire! I don’t know where I’m going, boy,’ he continued, with a cold, expressionless glance at me, ‘but I’m going away from here! I have *carphology*,’ he said, using a term which showed how clearly and accurately his mind still worked. ‘I thought my room was full of living gold, and I got up to grasp it. To whom will all mine go? I won’t let the government have it; I’ve made a will; find it, Grotius. La Belle Hollandaise had a daughter that I saw somewhere or other one evening—on Rue Vivienne. I think they call her *La Torpille*; she’s as pretty as a Love; hunt her up, Grotius. You are the executor of my will; take what you want and make the most of it; there’s pâté de foie gras, bales of coffee and sugar,

gold spoons. Give the Odiot service to your wife. But what about the diamonds? Do you care for 'em, boy? I have some tobacco; sell it at Hamburg at an advance of *fifty per cent*! In fact, I have everything, and I must leave it all behind me!—Come, come, Papa Gobseck,' he muttered, 'no weakness, be yourself.'

"He sat up in bed, his face was clearly outlined against his pillow as if it were of bronze; he stretched his wasted arm and bony hand out over the coverlid and grasped it as if to hold himself up; he glanced at the hearth, cold as his steely eye, and died in the full possession of his senses, presenting to the concierge, the veteran and myself a striking likeness of the keen-eyed old Romans whom Lethière has painted behind the consuls in his picture of *The Death of Brutus's Children*.

"What a nerve he had, the old Lascar!" said the veteran in his bluff, soldier-like way.

"For my own part I was still listening to the dying man's fantastic enumeration of his sources of wealth, and my eyes, which had followed his, rested on the heap of ashes, the size of which struck me as unusual. I took the tongs, and when I pushed them into the ashes I struck a pile of gold and silver, consisting, doubtless, of his collections during his illness, which he had been too weak to hide, or which his distrust of everybody had kept him from sending to the Bank.

"Run quickly to the justice of the peace,' I said to the veteran, 'so that the seals may be affixed here at once.'

“Deeply impressed by Gobseck’s last words, and by what the concierge had recently said to me, I took the keys of the rooms on the first and second floors for a tour of inspection. In the first room I opened, I found the explanation of what I had considered his insane words, for I saw there the effects of an avarice which had retained only the illogical instinct of which so many examples are afforded by misers in the provinces. In the room adjoining that in which Gobseck had breathed his last were mouldy pies, a mass of eatables of all sorts, even shellfish and other fish covered with a green mould, the diverse stench from which were near suffocating me. Worms and vermin were swarming everywhere. These offerings, of recent date, were mingled with boxes of all shapes, chests of tea, bales of coffee. Upon the mantel, in a silver tureen, were advices of the arrival of merchandise consigned to him at Havre,—bales of cotton, casks of sugar, hogsheads of rum, coffee, indigo, tobacco, a whole bazaar of colonial products! This room was crowded with furniture, silver-plate, lamps, pictures, vases, books, fine unframed engravings in rolls, and curiosities beyond number. It may be that this vast assortment of riches was not entirely made up of gifts; it may have consisted in part of unredeemed pledges. I saw jewel-cases with coats of arms or monograms, services of exquisite table-linen, weapons of priceless value, but all without labels. Upon opening a book that seemed to have been displaced, I found between the leaves several bank-notes of a

thousand francs. I promised myself that I would examine the smallest things, sound the floors, ceilings, cornices and walls, and make sure of finding all the gold amassed by this miserly old Dutchman, so worthy of Rembrandt's brush. In my whole professional career, I had never seen such results of avarice and originality of invention. When I returned to his room I found on his desk the explanation of the recent confused heaping up of his property. Under a paper-weight, there were certain letters that had passed between Gobseck and the dealers to whom he seems usually to have sold the presents he received. Now, whether because these people had been victimized by Gobseck's sharp dealing, or because Gobseck had demanded too high a price for his produce or manufactured articles, negotiations were suspended. He hadn't sold the eatables to Chevet because Chevet refused to take them at less than thirty per cent discount from their value. Gobseck haggled over a difference of a few francs, and during the discussion, the merchandise spoiled. He refused to pay the cost of delivery on his silver-plate. He would not agree to stand the loss in weight on the coffee. In short, every article was made a subject of contention, and this was the first symptom Gobseck exhibited of the childish, incomprehensible obstinacy, which seizes all old men in whom a powerful passion survives intelligence. I say to myself as he had said to himself: 'To whom will all this wealth go?'—As I think of the extraordinary information he had

given me as to his only heir, I fancy myself compelled to search all the houses of ill-fame in Paris in order to toss a tremendous fortune to some unworthy creature. But understand this first of all; by virtue of duly authenticated documents in proper form, Comte Ernest de Restaud will, within a few days, be in possession of a fortune which will permit him to marry Mademoiselle Camille, while setting aside for his mother, the Comtesse de Restaud, and for his brother and sister, their proper shares of his patrimony."

"Very well, dear Monsieur Derville, we'll think about it," Madame de Grandlieu replied. "Monsieur Ernest should be very wealthy if a family like ours is to accept his mother. Remember that my son will be Duc de Grandlieu some day, and the fortunes of the two branches of the Grandlieu family will be united in him; I wish him to have a brother-in-law to his liking."

"But," said the Comte de Born, "Restaud's arms are *gules with the cross-bar argent surrounded by four shields or, each surmounted by a cross sable*, and it's a very fine crest."

"True," said the viscountess; "moreover, Camille needn't see her mother-in law."

"Madame de Beauséant received Madame de Restaud," said the old uncle.

"Oh! yes, at her heterogeneous routs," replied the viscountess.

Paris, January, 1830.

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